A TRANSFORMATION

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Northern Saskatchewan is a land of rugged landscapes, unspoiled lakes and vast forests. From earliest times, people have been attracted to this region because of its abundant resources, and beautiful and unique natural environment. The people of northern Saskatchewan are renowned for their pioneering spirit and for their passionate connection to the land.

This publication, *Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation*, will enable readers to learn more about our northland, its peoples, its history of development and the potential for further social and economic growth.

Saskatchewan Northern Affairs (SNA) was established in 1996 to lead, coordinate and advocate initiatives in partnership with northern residents, communities, organizations and industry. It is significant that two northerners have led SNA since its inception. Keith Goulet, former Minister of Northern Affairs, is from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan's oldest permanent community, established in 1774. The Honourable Buckley Belanger, current Minister of Northern Affairs, comes from Ile à la Crosse, the province's second oldest settlement, established in 1776. I commend Mr. Goulet for his vision in determining the need for this publication, and I thank Mr. Belanger for ensuring that *Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation* has been completed.

Northern Saskatchewan – A Transformation was created to celebrate our past and to herald an era of partnerships and co-operation with government, industry and northerners. Through such partnerships, social and economic development that both benefits the people of the North and honours the spirit of the land will be assured for northern Saskatchewan.

I hope you enjoy reading this publication as much as I did.

Lorne Calvert
Premier of Saskatchewan

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A turn of the century encampment on the Saskatchewan prairie.
Photograph courtesy of Western Development Museum, Saskatoon Collection

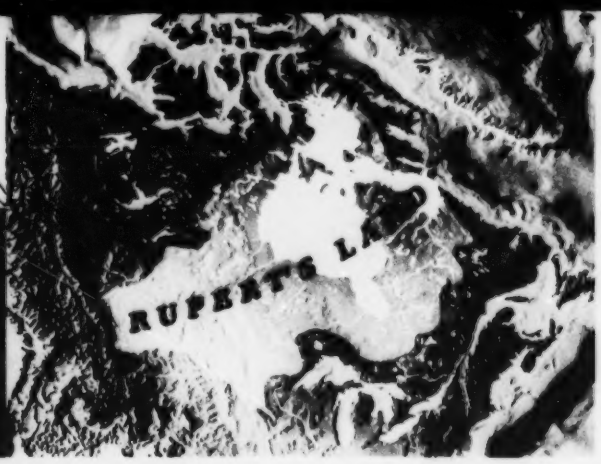


Image courtesy of Weldon Hiebert and the Centre for Rupert's Land Studies

Before the 20th Century: 1700 - 1899

The Fur Trade Arrives

Northern Saskatchewan is generally considered the area lying North of the 53rd parallel. It is a region teeming with thousands of lakes, rivers, and streams; expansive stretches of untouched forest, and a seemingly endless supply of natural resources. It is a region that was sought after during the era known as the fur trade. The region was part of a vast area of wilderness proclaimed as Rupert's Land in 1868 by King Charles II of England, named after his first cousin Prince Rupert.[1]

Owing to the fur trade, Saskatchewan's earliest known settlements were not those situated along rail lines in the South, but rather those trading posts located strategically along northern river routes. Long before steam locomotives and Red River carts trekked their way across the western interior, First Nations people were winding their way through the Saskatchewan, Churchill, and Clearwater River systems.[2] Inland supply and trading posts such as Cumberland House and Ile à la Crosse were well established long before the first settlers began to prepare the land for agriculture in the late nineteenth century.

As early as 700 A.D. four native cultural traditions started to evolve on the western plains: the Plains Village, Plains Woodland, Plains Hunter and Sub-Arctic. Today in northern Saskatchewan, the two pre-dominant First Nations groups are the Cree and Dené peoples.[3] By the time the fur trade was establishing commerce in the western interior, the Cree nation boundaries were generally areas lying south of the Athabasca Basin. The Dené nation in Saskatchewan during this time lived nomadically following the caribou herds as far north as present day Nunavut during the summer months, and as far south as present day La Ronge in the winter.[4]

Initially, European interest in the western interior was dominated almost exclusively by the fur trade. Two trading empires were established in this vast region; the Hudson's Bay Company, that was associated with the investment community in London, England; and the North West Company, a trading company established by a coalition of French merchants from New France.[5] The animal each trader was in search of was the beaver. Not only was this animal's pelt warm and protected by long and insulated fur, its shorter hair underneath was prime material for making felt hats and other associated garments for markets overseas. The Hudson's Bay Company, and the North West Company relied heavily on expansion in the West. The intent was not to establish permanent settlements, but to make contact with the indigenous peoples and trade goods back and forth from the West to eastern ports where ships were loaded with furs bound for European markets.[6]

By the time the two rival trading companies began to push further inland in search of more fur for European markets First Nations cultures had long been established in northern Saskatchewan. The concept of trade among Aboriginal peoples

was not a new one. For centuries previous, First Nations in Saskatchewan had been trading goods with other Nations from as far east as the Great Lakes, and west to the Pacific coast.[7] The introduction of European trade goods as early as the sixteenth century had a tremendous impact on the basic cultural elements of Saskatchewan's northern First Nations. A more catastrophic impact was the introduction of disease. After European arrival in the region there were countless outbreaks of smallpox epidemics. Many bands were practically wiped out in 1781, and again in 1838 when there was a vaccine available but many First Nations did not have access to it. Measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis took their toll on the original inhabitants and so too on the social and political structures that had existed prior to European contact.[8]

The social and political changes that occurred with European contact resulted in the creation of an entirely new society in present day Saskatchewan. Members of the 'new nation' as it was then called were the children of Europeans who began to settle the western interior and the First Nations people who had been living in the interior prior to the European arrival.[9] In the future their children would establish a new identity, one that consisted of both European and native cultures. The Métis Nation would later become a dominant force in the fur trade era throughout northern Saskatchewan.

By the late eighteenth century Dené and Cree guides helped traders and explorers such as Peter Pond, David Thompson, and Henry Kelsey open up the trade system to the Saskatchewan, Churchill, and Clearwater River systems. By the time the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company mended their differences and merged under one banner in 1821, there were hundreds of Hudson's Bay Company trading posts established throughout the western interior. Between the years of 1759 and 1870 there were close to 500 trading posts in Saskatchewan.[10]

By 1859, the year that the Hudson's Bay Company's licence to trade in the interior was due to expire, the British government was becoming less interested in the fur trade and more interested in the settlement potential of agricultural areas in what is now southern Saskatchewan. Following the Hynd exploration in 1858, and Palliser expeditions through the years 1857-1860, the lure of agricultural land bridged by dreams of a national railway began to take shape. Soon the trade good of choice would become wheat. The commodity that opened up the northern half of the province, the beaver, would become virtually non-existent in the western interior. The interests of eastern Canada and Europe shifted southward.

SETTLEMENT AND COLONIZATION

During the nineteenth century, the combination of primarily immigrant settlement of the southern prairie, the completion of the trans-continental railway in 1885, and a shift in consumer demand for silk instead of raw fur resulted in dramatic changes for the Hudson's Bay Company. By the close of that century the Dominion of Canada would form and as a result the Hudson's Bay Company would relinquish its vast trading territory to the newly created government. It was a Dominion government that had a grand vision of linking the eastern provinces with, what was then, the North West Territories; a government that would offer incentives for settlement of that territory; and a government that would attempt – with little success – to assimilate original inhabitants of that territory.

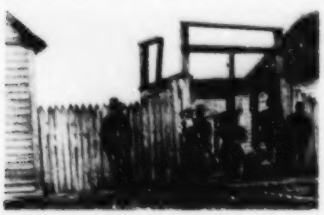
For settlement and agricultural commerce to occur in the Dominion's new northwest, the government of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald had to establish a process of negotiation with First Nations and Métis peoples. The intent of the negotiating was to provide for a policy of humanity and justice for the sole purpose of building a nation. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, and prior treaties signed before it, established this precedent based in law and as a whole the Canadian government and its few provinces continued with this approach.[11] The treaties that were signed relinquishing what is now northern Saskatchewan to the Dominion were treaty numbers five, six, eight, and ten.[12]

Before the treaties were signed in the 1870s, negotiations did not go as smoothly as the

Dominion government had hoped. What developed from the negotiations was that First Nations in these areas expected a relationship of peace, friendship, and mutual support with the Dominion government. The Treaty negotiators for the government on the other hand had the expectation that the treaties meant the surrender of land in exchange for gifts and annuities.[13] The two diverging expectations resulted in First Nations across northern Saskatchewan relinquishing their land to the Dominion government only to be assigned to specifically chosen reservations that exist throughout the North today. Further complication developed through the government's insistence that the fur trade was no longer viable and the only alternative for First Nations people was agriculture.[14]

A NEW NATION

This era of colonization also brought about the beginning of a new nation in northern Saskatchewan. The proximity and exchange that took place between Waskahisuneenniw (Aboriginal for the House of Fort People) and the new fur traders evolved into the new nation of Métis people by the early 1800s. This was later accentuated by the Métis free traders' challenge to the Hudson's Bay monopoly in the late 1840s and 1850s. After a relatively calm period the Métis were again incensed and felt betrayed by the Hudson's Bay Company after the company essentially sold Rupert's Land to Canada without their input. The origin of this nation began amid controversy and turmoil in the agricultural settlement of Red River, Manitoba. In the period of less than a month the Métis denied the Dominion government the right to move into that was then the Northwest Territories. The Dominion government, in an effort to enhance the immigration of settlers, began attempts to survey the region only to be stopped by Louis Riel on October 11, 1869. On November 2 William McDougall is sent by the government to establish authority as governor only to be turned back by the Métis before arriving in the area. As a result the Métis gathered under the leadership of Louis Riel to form a provisional government on December 10, 1869 in Red River. Prime Minister Macdonald then dispatched three negotiators between December 1869 and January 1870. Not satisfied with the current provisional government in Red River were loyalist settlers that continually plotted to overthrow the provisional government. A handful of these loyalists were either captured or spared from the death sentences that awaited a charge of treason. However, one loyalist named Thomas Scott continued to call the Métis cowards and dared anyone to shoot him. Scott was captured a second time by members of the provisional government, tried, and executed on March 4, 1870.[15] Immediately there were reports of retaliation by loyalists against the Métis in the form of beatings and intimidation. Even more disturbing was the stoning death of Elzear Goulet, a member of the provisional government. Goulet was killed while trying to get away from the advance of soldiers who were sent to Red River to settle the unrest that had erupted. The suppression of the "Red River Rebellion" led to a widespread Métis dispersal into the West, other parts of Canada, and the United States.



Northerners gathered outside of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan in 1907. *[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A 6942]*

Louis Riel *[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 3652]*

The confusing situation that developed during the era of Treaty negotiations in present day Saskatchewan became even more complicated in 1885 in the Batoche/St. Laurent area inhabited primarily by the Métis. Because the government's sole intent for the West was to establish homesteads and communities along branch lines that would spring up from the new trans-continental

railway, the acquisition of all land in the western interior was essential. The Métis, who had guided, hunted and lived off the land during the fur trade era, had established themselves along the trade routes by the middle of the nineteenth century.[16] Throughout 1884-1885 several protest meetings took place in this district instigated primarily by a man named William Jackson.[17] Although Jackson's intentions were to see whites and Métis unite against the government, the outcome of the Métis protest convinced the government to search for Louis Riel. [18]

By March of 1885 Riel, with the aid of another local Métis leader by the name of Gabriel Dumont, established a provisional Métis government at

Gabriel Dumont
[Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA-1063-1]

Batoche.[19] Riel and his forces would fight numerous skirmishes with the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP), later to become the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The Métis would eventually surrender on May 15, 1885. Dumont escaped to the United States while Riel was taken into custody immediately. Louis Riel was tried for treason, found guilty in a Regina courtroom and executed on November 16, 1885.[20]

The Northwest Resistance was relatively short but its legacy of struggle for the Métis Nation in central and northern Saskatchewan exists to this day. The Métis' role in the development of the fur trade and the effects this nation had on settlement in northwest Saskatchewan make its heritage an integral part of northern history. Today there are several communities throughout the North whose population is primarily that of Métis ancestry. Green Lake, Cumberland House, Ile à la Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, Beauval, and Meadow Lake are only a few of the larger communities in the North that have a substantial Métis population.[21] The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan is a political body that continues to advocate for the rights of the province's Métis population today.

The Dominion government's plan to establish agriculture as the dominant force in western settlement was only part of a larger plan focused solely on assimilation. The history of assimilation precedes the Dominion government's role regarding native policy. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church led by English and French missionaries played a dominant role in assimilating First Nations people into the European culture. Although the two churches' original intent was to Christianize what they considered to be wilderness people, the missionary work eventually led to a form of assimilating Native people into European society via religion and education.[22] The assimilation practices were largely unsuccessful but the missionary activity did introduce education and some form of native leadership into western society. This was largely offset by the intolerance missionaries had toward traditional lifestyles, customs, and beliefs.

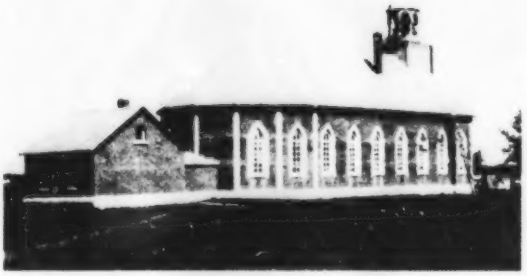
As early as 1820 the first Church of England missionary was established in Manitoba at the Red River colony. By 1850 the Church of England's Church Missionary Society (CMS) would push into the western interior establishing missionaries along the historic trade routes that penetrated Saskatchewan's North. The CMS' plan was to establish these temporary churches and schools in the hope that a more permanent settlement would some day progress. John West, the CMS founder at Red River dispatched catechists into northern Saskatchewan to establish these settlements. Henry Budd was one such CMS missionary who tried to establish a mission at Cumberland House in 1840 but later moved the location to The Pas, Manitoba. He would move further inland and establish missionaries near Fort a La Corne in

1852, with plans to establish another post at Fort Carlton.[23] James Settee, a native catechist, convinced Budd to move the Fort Carlton site north to Stanley Mission. Soon the CMS appointed Robert Hunt to establish and manage a CMS settlement at Stanley Mission. The northern village of Stanley Mission today holds the oldest standing building in Saskatchewan; the Holy Trinity Church located across from the present town site was completed by Robert Hunt and his congregation in 1856.[24] The CMS would set up other settlements following Stanley Mission. It would expand northeastward into the Sandy Bay and Pelican Narrows region, and into the northwest establishing missions in Buffalo Narrows and La Loche.

Roman Catholic Missions in northern Saskatchewan had a different purpose in mind as their missionaries ventured into the area. They too established a base at the Red River colony but had grand plans that would eventually dot the northern Saskatchewan landscape with permanent Roman Catholic churches and residential schools. The work was primarily carried out by priests

The province's oldest building, The Holy Trinity Church at Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan.
(Photograph courtesy of Woodland Aerial Photography)

arriving in Manitoba in 1845 who were part of Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).[25] The OMI was founded in France in 1814 and focused on teaching Christianity through local languages and helping the poor. Two prominent OMI priests, Fathers Taché and Laflèche, would be instrumental in establishing permanent Catholic missions in the province's North. Chateau Saint-Jean at Ile à la Crosse remains today after the original church and surrounding buildings were erected in 1846.[26] From this larger mission the two priests set out to establish other missions in Reindeer Lake, La Ronge, Green Lake, La Loche, Beauval and Buffalo



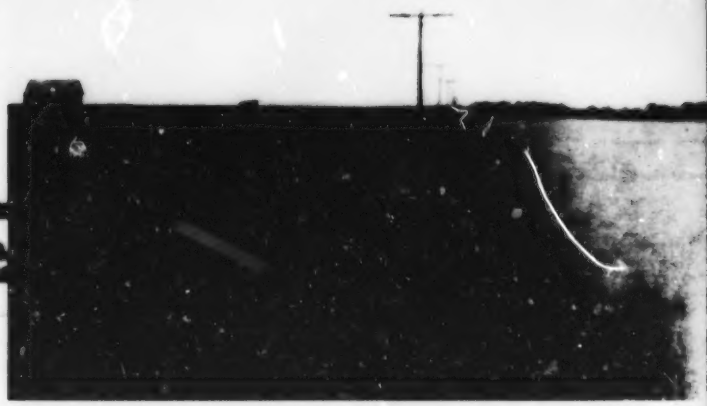
Roman Catholic Church at Ile a la Crosse, Saskatchewan, ca. 1940.
(Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A 24, 433 (1))

Narrows.[27] By the later half of the nineteenth century, each of these Catholic missions would house a permanent priest who would serve a congregation spread out over hundreds of miles of very rough and often uninviting terrain. Later the Roman Catholic Church would send out members of the Grey Nuns to assist the priests in their missionary work. Teaching would eventually become the primary role for members of the Grey Nuns, the success of which was limited because the educational curriculum of these schools countered the educational traditions of the First Nations people.

It would be several years before the Dominion government and the Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories would officially establish the Province of Saskatchewan in 1905. The Dominion government had been trying to control and assimilate First Nations peoples since the mid-eighteenth century.[28] In later years the Indian Act ensured the Dominion government had control of the native population on reserves through an elective system of band government.[29] To many First Nations people, this elected system signified the beginning of the end of their traditional political system, one that had existed centuries before European contact. Many did not favour the change since it was another tool to assist religion and education in assimilating the First Nations culture into a European culture.

From this history of 18th and 19th century contact with Europeans, development of the fur trade, signing of treaties with First Nations and emergence of the Métis Nation, the scene was set for the 20th century transformation.

[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A8692]



[Photograph courtesy of Western Development Museum, Saskatoon Collection]

The 20th Century: 1900 - 1989

Wars, Depression and an Emerging New Economy

To most Canadians, including the increasing numbers that populated the bustling agricultural lands of southern Saskatchewan at the beginning of the new century, northern Saskatchewan was out-of-sight and out-of-mind. Nevertheless, creation of the Province in 1905 formally drew boundary lines to the 60th parallel, establishing northern Saskatchewan as a distinct region within the new jurisdiction. It would not be until 1930 that the federal *Natural Resources Transfer Act* would give the Saskatchewan and Alberta governments control of Crown lands and natural resources within their boundaries, comparable to eastern provinces. Except for First Nation reserves, almost all of northern Saskatchewan was designated Crown land.

During the first half of the century, northern residents (fewer than 15,000 at the time – mostly Cree, Dené and Métis scattered across the top half of the province) struggled to develop their society in the post fur-trade era. They received little support from federal or provincial governments. Some northerners made their way south to volunteer as Canadian soldiers during the First World War of 1914-1918. With the advent of radio broadcasting, and the introduction of battery operated receivers in northern communities, many more northerners heard about the advent of the Second World War as part of their new communications connection to the rest of Canada. Scores of young northerners, struggling to survive in their homeland, ventured south and joined the armed forces – sometimes walking hundreds of kilometres to do so. Those soldiers from Saskatchewan First Nations were not even legally considered citizens and held no rights to vote in provincial or federal elections. On returning home from European battlefields, both Métis and First Nations veterans found that the Dominion would not provide them with the same benefits granted non-native veterans.

Most northerners continued a life close to the land – hunting and fishing for sustenance and trapping to sell furs for flour, sugar, hardware and other staples that had become part of northern life. By the 1930s, the Depression and drought occurring in southern Canada would have an impact on northern life.

The period from 1929 to 1939 in Saskatchewan is the bleakest in the province's history. The descriptive term "the dirty thirties" is often the phrase associated with this period. For most of the province, the 1930s were relentless years of economic hardship, depressed commodity prices, and severe drought. A common misconception to this day is that every region of the province faced the same situation. Although there were many similarities, there were also very distinct regional differences in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression. The southern area of the province was a "dust bowl" as hot and dry winds blew topsoil from section to section. The north-central regions of the province experienced drought as well, albeit not to the same degree, while northern regions of

the province remained relatively wet and green for many of these years. All of the regions suffered from unemployment due to an economic collapse of international commodities and depressed currency. Northern areas of the province became a destination for many families and individuals as they trekked northward in search of work, food, and a better way of life.

During the 1930s, northern Saskatchewan remained virtually cut off from the outside world. A road stretching from Prince Albert to Montreal Lake was the only land access available. From there a waterway extending north from Montreal Lake to La Ronge was the region's only connection to the southern half of the province. Traveling this route meant days or weeks on end to reach Prince Albert. It would not be until the late 1940s that a road would reach La Ronge providing overland transportation to the North. Initially the gravel road (Highway No. 969) extended north of Prince Albert, through the northern communities of Montreal Lake, Timber Bay, Molanosa and into La Ronge. A large portion of the route ran parallel to the east shoreline of Montreal Lake. It wasn't until the 1970s that the province relocated the highway to the west side of the lake (Highway No. 2) and converted it to asphalt. Today the community of Weyakwin exists along this route. The community's name translates from Cree as "swearing" and was adopted by local people given the penchant of southern freighters to heartily curse the difficulty of making freight hauls through the region. Upon completion of the road into La Ronge in the later half of the twentieth century news and communication spread further south about the vast amount of resources that lie in Saskatchewan's North. Interest began to grow in a variety of circles as to how those resources could be accessed. As a result, several industries emerged and moved northern Saskatchewan ahead.

Gold

The first significant gold discovery in the province was in 1913 in the Flin Flon area. More significant, however, was a few years into the throes of the Great Depression when news of a gold strike on the north shore of Lake Athabasca prompted hundreds of would-be prospectors to enter Saskatchewan's North. The drought and despair associated with southern Saskatchewan quickly transformed into rumours of wealth further north. The demand for transport of prospectors into this area became so great that by 1935 three air charter companies were trying to keep up with the demand of people heading north in search of gold.[30] The tent city of Goldfields was eventually established on the north shore of Lake Athabasca and the community of La Ronge grew rapidly into an aircraft refuelling and destination point for pilots and prospectors heading beyond.

Commercial Fishing

During this time another industry began to develop in Saskatchewan's North – one that remains strong today. Commercial fishing in the thousands of lakes throughout the northern landscape provided a seemingly unlimited supply of freshwater fish for which there were international markets. Although catching and netting the fish was challenging, backbreaking work, it was still the easy part of the job. The challenge was to transport the fish as clean and as quickly as possible. Because the fish were destined for markets thousands of miles away, it was imperative that they were cleaned directly at the lake, frozen, and transferred to the railhead in communities such as Prince Albert or Big River.[31]

The only way to manage such an operation was to have cleaning plants established on these northern lakes which meant a huge demand for manual labourers willing to travel to remote locations and stay there all winter cleaning fish. The prime season for hauling was the winter months since northern Saskatchewan acts as a natural deep freeze for this period.

Freighting

Another important industry that coincided with commercial fishing was the freight haul.[32] A few fishers handled their own freighting operations but, as the business became more popular, freighting developed into a colourful and historic part of the history of northern Saskatchewan. Freighting meant another source of work for those in search of employment through the height of the Depression. The first freight hauls in and out of Saskatchewan's North were several horse drawn sleighs. As mechanization became more familiar in the North, the horse was replaced with a caterpillar to form what have been called cat swings. This heavy equipment meant larger loads and fewer trips throughout the winter.[33] As roads pushed farther and farther into the bush, trucks took over the hauling and the cat swings became outdated. Soon after the truck haul era, airplanes began to transport fresh fish on a regular basis.

Fur

While freshwater commercial fishing was established as an industry in northern Saskatchewan during the 1930s, the fur industry also experienced a period of expansion. It was the fur trade that opened up this section of the province and it was an industry that flourished during the height of the Depression. The high price of furs during this era lured many trappers into uncharted territory. The main mode of transportation into these remote areas was still via the waterways during the summer months and by dog team during the winter. Stories of trappers in northern Saskatchewan soon spread into the southern regions and many adventurers disheartened by drought and despair headed north to make a living.

The primary fur dealer in northern Saskatchewan during this period was the well-established Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in addition to Revillon Freres, which had only a few trading posts throughout northern Saskatchewan. The HBC had posts scattered throughout Saskatchewan's North since the early days of the Company's original exploration of the area.[34] Trappers had no choice but to deal with the HBC since it was the only buyer for literally hundreds of miles. Eventually this situation would change and the trappers would have more opportunity to sell to other buyers. In large part trapping had been a way of life for centuries in Saskatchewan's North, and it became a way of life for many others who ventured there during the Depression. From the trapping industry evolved another sector of the economy that arose primarily in the Buffalo Narrows and Ile à la Crosse regions. Mink would soon replace the beaver as the fur of choice and the demand for its soft, shiny coat soon increased. To keep up with market demand, mink ranches were established along various lakeshores to enable the ranch keepers to have close access to a reliable source of food for the animals. With hundreds of small animals being fed a diet of strictly fish every day the result is a substantial amount of fish netted from these lakes. Consequently the commercial fishing industry and the mink ranching industry did not always exist in harmony.

A group of fur traders gathered around bales of fur outside of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Ile à la Crosse, Saskatchewan, 1927.
[Photograph courtesy of National Archives of Canada, R-B 9750]

Because of the increase in the activity of traditional land use, northern resources underwent substantial pressure during this era. In particular, the beaver and muskrat populations noticed a massive decline. In response, the provincial government initiated a fur conservation program in 1946, the first attempt at conservation practice to be developed in Saskatchewan.[35]

The program's main thrust was to divide the province into fur conservation blocks which would allow only local trappers to undertake their

operations within a designated area. By 1954 there were 93 such areas in the province each managed by a council made up of trappers who consulted on a regular basis with government officials. The program also transplanted beaver from southern Saskatchewan into northern regions replenishing the animal's numbers from virtually non-existent in 1944, to abundant only ten years later.[36]

Timber

Another industry that began to evolve as a result of better access to Saskatchewan's North during the 1930s was the timber industry. Crude bush roads that were ploughed through the forests during the winter months allowed contractors to harvest timber for a variety of purposes. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the timber industry in northern Saskatchewan consisted of private operators establishing lumber mills wherever a trail or railhead would provide access to markets. In the case of Big River, numerous lumber companies established themselves on the shores of Cowan Lake where the present town site exists today.[37] After some of the larger companies dismantled their operations and moved on to other endeavours when timber prices started to fall, private operators again started their own operations. These smaller, private mills received permits from the provincial government and would seek out a profitable timber area and begin logging. The timber harvested would be sold to planing mills or individuals.[38] The expansion of railway branch lines throughout Saskatchewan also helped the industry as hundreds of contracts were taken out for supplying railway ties. The demand for railway ties, as Saskatchewan's rail system developed, kept many of the individual timber operators in business during the Depression.

The expansion and development of these natural resources that were plentiful in Saskatchewan's North changed the landscape and dynamics of this region forever. Although traditional lifestyles and customs were still practiced in the region, the influx of settlers from the South, many of whom decided to stay in the North, completely changed the physical and social dynamics of northern Saskatchewan. It would not be until after the Second World War that the provincial government would further expand and manage these industries and the resources they were using. It was the war itself and the election of a new type of government in Saskatchewan that would significantly alter the course of history for northern Saskatchewan.

The 40s and 50s - an Era of Government Intervention

If there ever was a positive spin-off from World War II for Saskatchewan, it was the opportunity for growth and expansion. Many Saskatchewan people enlisted to serve overseas, while others stayed home to help the war effort through manufacturing and filling in for the numerous job vacancies that had resulted. By the end of World War II the political climate in Saskatchewan was much the same as the rest of the country; the voting public was looking for a political platform that would focus on social policy and the needs of common people who had sacrificed so much during the Depression and the war effort. The electorate wanted change.

Political and Economic change

The 1944 provincial election in Saskatchewan attracted an unprecedented number of voters. More than 80 per cent of eligible voters turned out to cast a ballot.[39] The electorate gave an overwhelming mandate to the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) led by a young Baptist Minister, Thomas Clement Douglas. Saskatchewan had elected its first "socialist" government with an agenda and a mandate to bring change to the province.[40] The CCF was a form of socialism comprised of an alliance of farmers, labourers, and professionals believing in British parliamentary institutions. Prairie historian Gerald Friesen suggests why the CCF was the party of choice:

"It was an indigenous response to long-term urban and class issues as well as to the immediate crisis of the agricultural depression. The CCF was a movement, at times radical, at times moderate in outlook, seeking economic security and the amelioration of social injustice."[41]

Public ownership of the province's utilities and resources was a key component of the new government's platform.[42] The government expressed particular interest in industries that primarily evolved around the use of publicly owned natural resources. To facilitate resource development, several corporations were established that would manufacture certain products from these commodities. By 1947 Saskatchewan was home to numerous Crown corporations. For the North this meant a change in the way fish and fur would be sold, timber would be harvested, and mining would develop. Soon marketing co-operatives were established to buy and sell northern resources with the objective of ensuring producers received a favourable return.

Premier Douglas and Minister of Natural Resources Joe Phelps at the official opening of the Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Service, Regina, Saskatchewan, 1946.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 269 (2)]

To introduce serious competition for buying trappers' fur production, the new government quickly established the Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Service. The central agency bought, prepared, graded, and sold the furs to buyers who would gather from American, European and Canadian markets.[43] The intent of the service was to provide the trappers

of northern Saskatchewan with a fair grading and fair market price for their furs.

Inspecting furs at the Saskatchewan Government Trading Company post at Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan, 1955.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A 5273]

In 1945 the provincial government created the Saskatchewan Forest Products Company which was intended to achieve maximum utilization of the province's forest resources for the benefit of all of the people of Saskatchewan.[44] The corporation was split into two divisions: the Saskatchewan Timber Board and Saskatchewan Wood Enterprises. The Saskatchewan Timber Board acted as a single agency that would produce and market publicly owned timber from Crown lands. Prior to the creation of the Board, timber was sold to private operators who had complete control over the marketing of the product.[45] Establishment of the board also meant controlled cutting in every region of the province with the establishment of sawmills (Big River, Hudson Bay, Nipawin, Carrot River and Prince Albert) providing jobs to areas of the province in need of an employment boom.[46] The Board implemented forms of timber conservation and effectively provided coordination for the province's timber industry.

Saskatchewan Wood Enterprises was quite small in comparison to the Timber Board but it coincided with several other initiatives already underway in the North. Its primary purpose was to utilize salvage timber that would be of little or no value to wholesale buyers.[47] One of the corporation's duties was to employ northerners to cut, prepare, and build wooden boxes that would ship the millions of pounds of freshwater fish that were to be boxed and freighted to international markets. Aside from the box factory the corporation also produced building materials, and rough-cut lumber that would be used in a variety of construction projects.[48]

The marketing of freshwater fish from the lakes and rivers in Saskatchewan's North also attracted the interventionist government's attention. In 1949 the Saskatchewan Fish Marketing Service was created to guarantee fish suppliers better bargaining power through a single selling agency.[49] By the mid 1950s nearly seven hundred commercial fishermen from forty-five lakes throughout the North were using the agency to sell freshwater fish. The preparation and packaging of these fish was a large part of the Service's duty. Several filleting and packing plants were built in northern communities such as Pinehouse Lake, Reindeer Lake, and Amisk Lake. The largest plant was located on the La Ronge town site and was well used by both commercial and sport fishermen alike.[50] The catching and preparation of freshwater fish had this industry playing a highly significant role in northern Saskatchewan's development. The marketing service would later evolve to become a fishermen's co-operative.

Cleaning freshwater fish for packaging at the filleting plant in La Ronge, Saskatchewan, ca. 1955.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 5811]

Another enterprise directly related to the North was Saskatchewan Government Trading. Now that buying and selling through Crown agencies was competing with private dealers in the fish and fur industries, the Douglas government felt it should do the same for household goods.

The Saskatchewan Government Trading Post at Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan, 1955.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A 5273]

Government trading posts were built to curb the monopoly of long-standing HBC posts in communities such as Stanley Mission, Cumberland House, Deschambault Lake, and Pinehouse Lake in the late 1940s.[51]

Arguably the most important long-term impact on the post-war economy of northern Saskatchewan was the discovery of uranium. Following World War II, and the introduction of atomic energy, the world entered a completely different conflict, one focused on strategic alliances and an East versus West attitude. The Cold War had developed with eastern European countries pitted against Western nations in an age of atomic warfare. Uranium was of course the key component for this type of warfare and as such was highly sought after during the 1950s. With the knowledge that Saskatchewan held some of the world's richest uranium deposits and with the aid of the provincial government's newly created Prospectors Assistance Plan, prospectors laid claim to more than 15,000 stakes in the Athabasca region of northern Saskatchewan in 1953 and 1954.[52]

Given its strategic importance, the federal government who regulated uranium development, banned development by the private sector. While this ban was later lifted, the federal Crown corporation, Eldorado Nuclear Ltd., became the largest uranium producer with operations in the far north of Saskatchewan and Ontario.[53] To aid in northern development the provincial government decided to establish a town site in order to service uranium and gold mines in the area. Uranium City, and the nearby Eldorado mine site, eventually grew to have a population of 4,000. In later years, the nature of northern mining changed dramatically but for three decades the Uranium City area was its centre.

Government Services

Provincial highways were slowly pushed northward with the first road link to La Ronge established in the late 1940s. In response to the need for more reliable and efficient transportation services in the province overall, the government created two publicly owned transportation companies in 1947. The Saskatchewan Transportation Company would engage in passenger and cargo delivery via bus, while Saskatchewan Government Airways (SGA) would provide the same services to less accessible regions of the province, more particularly in northern Saskatchewan, via aircraft. SGA quickly developed to become one of Canada's leading bush plane services with a growing fleet that served northern communities and the needs of the expansion in the development of northern resources. The new government had also established the world's first non-military air ambulance service in 1946, a particularly critical service for residents living in remote northern areas where only rudimentary health services were available in a few of the larger communities.

Loading a Saskatchewan Government Airways aircraft on a northern Saskatchewan lake, ca. 1955.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 5415 (1)]

Another area of service to the North where Saskatchewan became an international leader was radio communications. In 1946 the government

created the Radio Branch of the Department of Natural Resources. Until that time, northerners had to rely on primitive radio equipment used by various agencies without the benefit of a formal network of stations to serve the needs of industry, government and individual citizens. In addition to improving emergency services and introducing a public "radiogram" service, the Radio Branch aided in medical services, forest fire suppression, weather data for aircraft, and logistical support for the many business activities that had developed. Later, trappers and others working "on the land" were rented portable equipment to maintain radio communication links.

In support of improved communications to and among northern communities, the Department of Natural Resources also initiated a daily radio broadcast ("Northern News") aired on the Prince Albert radio station CKBI. Northerners would faithfully listen to the program to receive market and community information and personal messages – essential communication in the days before telephone service was available to northern homes.

The interventionist policies of the CCF government in the post-war period changed the social, economic and political landscape of northern Saskatchewan. It was no longer a monopolistic system that could buy and sell raw goods from northerners at its own discretion. The Crown corporations, marketing boards and co-operatives were established to provide the province, including northern communities, with a sense of social ownership. Not all of the government's ambitious interventions of the 1940s and 1950s were successful but northern Saskatchewan transformed from an invisible hinterland to a region of significant development and, for some, relative prosperity.

New Expectations

During the 1960s, commercial fishing in northern Saskatchewan achieved record production levels but Canada's freshwater industry faced new international marketing demands and serious price fluctuations. In 1969 Saskatchewan joined with other provincial and territorial jurisdictions in supporting establishment of a federal Crown corporation, the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, to provide a single marketing agency to seek improved markets and better prices for fishers. Whitefish quality issues and higher production costs, together with debates over resource allocation among commercial fishermen, outfitters and mink ranchers, led to lower returns in future years.

Aided by the growth in air transportation in the 1950s, tourism – primarily in the form of sports fishing outfitters – experienced steady growth through the 60s. Northern road construction was a priority with the official completion of the Hanson Lake Road to Creighton and Flin Flon in 1965.[54] With international interest in the potential of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, the potential for expanding uranium mining became apparent. The discovery of a uranium deposit near Rabbit Lake in 1968 would lead to the development of another uranium mine by Gulf Minerals, west of Wollaston Lake, in 1975. This mine signified Canada's first new uranium development in more than a decade.

In 1964 amendments to the *Northern Administration Act of 1948* established rudimentary local government structures in addition to the First Nation Band Council system created by the federal Department of Indian Affairs. Increasingly provincial governments recognized that existing governance structures and economic opportunities were not keeping pace with the needs and expectations of a growing and younger population. Not all northerners had the skills or educational opportunities to participate in new economic developments. By themselves, traditional activities of trapping and fishing could not support a growing population. As in other northern regions of Canada, "welfare", introduced by the federal and provincial governments to support families in need, became a continuing element of the northern economy, chipping away at northerners' long history of self-reliance and independence.

The Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS)

Public servants and Cabinet Ministers recognized that the northern half of Saskatchewan was distinct – geographically, culturally, and in terms of socio-economic realities – from the urban and rural mix of the South. Interventionist policies of the 40s and 50s had improved services and introduced new economic initiatives in the region, but socio-economic disparities persisted between North and South. Northerners began demanding more input into the decision-making that affected their lives and communities.

From the active interventionist period of the 40s and 50s, the Northern Administration Branch of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had emerged as the lead agency of the provincial government in northern Saskatchewan.[55] Initially the DNR was responsible for the routine duties of regulating and managing the natural resources that were clearly abundant in many areas of the North. The primary agents responsible for this management were Conservation Officers; people who were trained for the management and enforcement of resource policy, not the development and management of a variety of government programs. But as representatives of the government on the northern front lines, they had become involved in such tasks as regulating and administering social assistance, assisting in local government affairs, taxation, and the establishment of cooperatives – tasks that were not originally intended for the department.[56]

During the 50s and 60s, other departments established more of a presence in the North but "the DNR" was seen as the main provincial authority that influenced, and in some cases controlled, the lives of northerners.

In the 1940s and 1950s it became apparent that the political, social, and economic conditions of northern Saskatchewan were being tremendously affected by the introduction of new government programs.[57] For example, the provision of health services to northern regions as a result of improved transportation and communication contributed to significant population growth. As a result additional resources and an expanded economic base would have to be implemented in order to further meet the needs of northern residents.[58]

As early as 1959 the provincial government began to discuss the possibility of creating a single agency that would be responsible for the management and provision of government resources and programs that directly relate to northern Saskatchewan.[59] Both the Department of Finance and the independent Centre for Community Studies recommended the concept during the 1960s. A Finance department assessment referred to "a special purpose in the North – to accelerate political, economic and social development in order to bring the services and standards to a level *comparable though not necessarily identical* with those in the South".[60] The Finance report suggested that a single delivery and coordination agency is "likely to give the fullest recognition to the needs of the North and to the necessity for novel solutions."[61] The report noted that an aim of the agency should be self-liquidation – that once northern conditions had become comparable to the rest of the province, provincial government programs would revert to conventional government departments.

The idea of a single agency concept blanketing all government programs in the North created considerable controversy within existing provincial departments. The concept was put on hold through the 1960s. It surfaced again in the 1971 provincial election when it formed part of the platform of the newly elected government led by Premier Allan Blakeney.[62] The Department of Northern Saskatchewan Act was passed in the legislature on April 21, 1972. Ted Bowerman, an MLA from Shellbrook, was appointed its first Minister. In a meeting of department staff (including new employees and those who had been transferred from other agencies), Blakeney, spoke about the department's mandate:

"We look to the new department to provide a new focus for building government services in the North, with the involvement of the people living

in northern communities. This means involvement not only in an advisory capacity – but also in a developing capacity of self-government and local decision making...it will require readiness...to abandon the safe, standardized approaches to the delivery of government services...and it will take an equal dedication on the part of the people living in northern communities to develop their interest in self government and their skills in decision making."[63]

From 1972 to 1974, the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) took full responsibility for most government programs within the Northern Administration District.[64] It was the beginning of a period of intense activity – together with some related controversy – fostered by a provincial government department that, for the first time, was headquartered in the North instead of Regina.

Initially the government appointed a Northern Development Advisory Council of northern residents to provide advice to the Minister and senior management as to priorities and programs of the new department. Later the Council gave way to the increasing influence of regional and local municipal councils that developed during the DNS era. Within the department were staff who felt DNS was introducing too much change too quickly while others expressed the opposite concern. Innovation flourished on all fronts.

The department's budget grew with its responsibilities, increasing from $21 million in 1973-74 to $103 million in 1982-83.[65] Major northern expenditure increases were also recorded by other provincial agencies including the departments of Justice and Highways and various Crown corporations. Beyond the federal government's direct financial responsibilities for First Nation Reserves, under a federal-provincial *Saskatchewan Canda Northlands Agreement* contributed almost $90 million towards northern capital projects and socio-economic programs during the DNS years. As well, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) was actively involved in social housing programs as a partner with DNS. Over an eight-year period to the end of 1981, the provincial government had developed an impressive list of northern achievements:

Infrastructure

- Construction of 1,300 social housing and subsidized home-ownership housing units.
- Road access extended to various communities such as Deschambault Lake, Stanley Mission, Pinehouse, Patuanak, Southend and Dillon.
- Rebuilding and paving of Highway 2 to La Ronge; construction of a bridge across the Churchill River at Buffalo Narrows to replace ferry service on Highway 155.
- Twelve new airfields; upgrades to existing airports such as La Ronge, Buffalo Narrows and Stony Rapids.
- Provincial electric power services by Sask Power to 17 additional northern communities.
- Extension of SaskTel microwave service from 24 per cent to 97 per cent of the population helping to increase access to CBC radio and television from 15 per cent to 96 per cent.
- Fourteen sewer and water systems.
- First schools in eight settlements with replacements and expansions elsewhere.
- Development of community sub-divisions, industrial parks, municipal offices, fire halls and equipment, community halls, and docks.
- Construction of new forest fire suppression bases at Buffalo Narrows and La Ronge supported by new Tracker and Canso fire fighting aircraft.
- Creation of new campgrounds and recreational subdivisions (e.g. Clearwater River, La Ronge, Napatak and Weyakwin).[66]

Social Development

- Provincial health staff in the North tripled including clinic nurses, community health workers, mental health nurses, health educators, dental assistants and doctors.
- Implementation of a northern Children's Dental Program supported by six new base clinics and four satellite clinics.
- New community health centres built in Sandy Bay and Pinehouse.
- A "Perishable Food Transportation Subsidy" program implemented for "fly-in" communities reducing costs and increasing availability of fruit, vegetables and dairy products.
- Expansion of home care, day care, foster care, recreation and alcohol rehabilitation programs and services.
- Introduction of three community colleges and post-secondary training bursary programs, new training centres in Buffalo Narrows and La Ronge, and implementation of affirmative action training initiatives to increase the employment of northerners within the public service.
- Creation of a Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), 1976.
- Development of northern curricula and teaching materials that reflect Cree and Dené cultures.
- A 300 per cent increase in operational grants to northern schools.
- Location of legal aid lawyers and magistrates in the North.
- Introduction of Cree and Dené language radio broadcasting; introduction of community radio station in Green Lake; and development of *Denosa* as a monthly northern Saskatchewan magazine.[67]

Political Development

- Expansion of local government councils from 11 to 41; creation of a Northern Municipal Council to address regional municipal government; provision of more than $9 million per year in new funding for grants to northern local governments.
- Development of a new Northern Municipalities Act.[68]
- Introduction of elected school boards for all northern school divisions and creation of an independent school division in Ile à la Crosse; election of local education committees for schools administered by the Northern Lights School Division; creation of independent boards to administer three community colleges.

Economic Development

- Provision of $15 million in loans and $6 million in grants to assist in the development of northern owned enterprises.

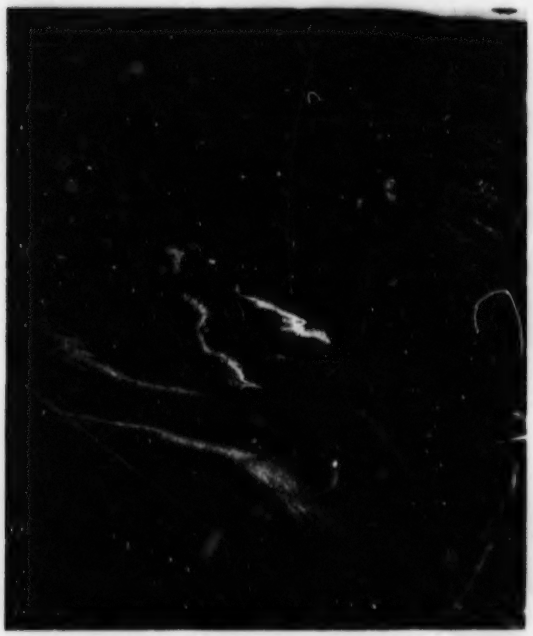
Collecting a day's catch of freshwater fish on a northern Saskatchewan lake, ca. 1955.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 6061 (3)]

- Introduction of commercial fishing Transportation Equalization Program and Fish Price Support Program to address high transportation costs faced by fishers in remote areas and the impact of depressed market prices on certain species.

- Increased participation by northerners in forestry through the operation of five small sawmills, two planer mills and a log mill, together with a tree-skidder leasing program to northern contractors and support for community-owned post cutting operations.

- Development of a wild rice production program.

- Expansion of the Prospectors' Incentive Plan including training of northern prospectors.



The Rabbit Lake Uranium Mine in northern Saskatchewan.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

- Provision of a northern preference policy for government contracts whereby bids from northern owned contractors that were within 10 per cent of the lowest bid would be chosen over other contractors.[69]

Uranium Development

The expansion of uranium mining and processing was a significant issue during the DNS era of the 1970s. Following the post-war era, under an international treaty to ensure its peaceful use, private

The Key Lake Uranium Mine in northern Saskatchewan.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

sector ownership of uranium mines became possible. By the 1960s interest in nuclear energy grew significantly. However, due to delayed development of the industry in the United States, the demand for uranium dropped significantly by 1964; Eldorado Nuclear was the sole uranium producer in the province. Surviving only with federal subsidies and production cutbacks Eldorado Nuclear faced serious financial difficulty. In northern Saskatchewan, a provincial government program had boosted exploration, resulting in the discovery of the richest uranium deposit known at that time.[70] This led to Gulf Minerals Ltd. developing a new uranium mine in northeast Saskatchewan at Rabbit Lake, and a further discovery in the northwest at Cluff Lake. In 1974, the Saskatchewan government entered an exploration partnership with Uranerz Exploration and Mining Ltd. and the Saskatchewan Mining Development Corporation (SMDC) was born. This partnership would discover and develop the Key Lake mine. Rabbit Lake, Cluff Lake and Key Lake represented the second generation of mines and made uranium the largest and most valuable mineral sector in northern Saskatchewan.[71] In 1988 SMDC and Eldorado eventually merged to form the Cameco Corporation with the subsequent divestment of the provincial and federal interests.[72]

Although the federal government claimed responsibility for governing uranium developments, Saskatchewan insisted that it should participate in regulating the industry to ensure Saskatchewan interests were addressed. To this end, public inquiries were conducted into all aspects of the proposed mine in Cluff Lake (the

Bayda Inquiry of 1975) and Key Lake (the Mitchell Inquiry of 1978) and a joint Federal/Provincial Inquiry in 1991. These inquiries addressed all aspects of uranium development including the means by which northern residents could ensure socio-economic benefits from such development.

When federal and provincial approval for the Cluff Lake and Key Lake mines was provided, the concept of using provincial government "surface lease agreements" as a means of achieving northern benefits was born. Through the Department of Northern Saskatchewan, the mining companies were required to achieve northern employment targets and provide preference to northern contractors. It is a concept that has evolved in subsequent years but one that continues to achieve northern benefits from uranium mining that might not otherwise have occurred.

Decanting and Devolving

The Department of Northern Saskatchewan had achieved a level of concerted and coordinated effort for the region not previously seen. The construction of Mistasinihk Place in 1980, the provincial government office building in La Ronge, assured northerners that the provincial services for the North would continue to be administered from the North. But given the government's original intent that, over time, provincial programs would revert to regular line departments, discussions of such "decanting" had begun by 1980. At the same time, considerations as to what responsibilities might be "devolved" to northern governance authorities were taking place.

By 1982, forest protection and management responsibilities had been formally transferred from DNS to the Department of Tourism and Renewable Resources. A new Progressive Conservative government elected in April 1982, cognizant of the costs and controversies associated with DNS, chose to wind down the department. In announcing the decision in July of 1982, the new Minister responsible for DNS, George McLeod, expressed concern that "there was a growing dependence on the part of individuals and groups on DNS". The Minister said the government would concentrate on dealing with "serious shortfalls that have occurred in the area of municipal self-government and economic self-sufficiency".[73]

The decade of the 1980s proved to be a challenging one for northern Saskatchewan. The structure of provincial governance underwent many changes as did programs and government spending throughout the North. In 1983 the provincial government abolished the Department of Northern Saskatchewan. Northern Mayors and communities organized themselves under the Saskatchewan Association of Northern Local Governments. One concern raised was that key issues specific to the North, and the voices of northern elected leadership were being by-passed. The government responded by passing legislation enabling the creation of an advisory council specific to the North.

The 1984 legislation allowed for the creation of a small Secretariat to oversee and coordinate provincial government approaches to the North and for the appointment of a new Northern Development Advisory Council (NDAC).[74] Through the Minister responsible for the Secretariat, 11 members were chosen to serve on the NDAC, primarily from communities throughout northern Saskatchewan. The mandate of the NDAC was very broad but allowed council members to determine the concerns and needs of northern residents, recommend what the government's focus and priority should be, and promote dialogue, decision making, and partnership between government and private industry. Each year between six and eight public meetings were scheduled and were advertised through radio, local newspapers, and postings throughout the northern communities in which the meetings were held. The results of NDAC discussions would then be forwarded to the Minister responsible for the Northern Affairs Secretariat, who would share northern concerns with the Cabinet.[75]

Major issues identified during the initial operation of the NDAC included:

- Lack of adequate transportation infrastructure

- The need for strengthened economic opportunities
- Easier access to Crown lands and resources
- Expansion and repair of municipal infrastructure
- Assistance in carrying out certain municipal services
- Lack of adequate health care facilities
- Expensive communications services[76]

During the 1980s, the government's use of Surface Lease Agreements to achieve northern social and economic benefits from uranium mining changed. Instead of setting northern employment and business contract "quotas", that were not always met, the parties agreed to work together in identifying best efforts that would achieve the same goal. The practice of preparing annual Human Resource Development Agreements for each mine project was introduced. The Northern Labour Market Committee – a quarterly gathering of representatives from government, industry, Aboriginal authorities, and northern organizations – was formed to informally identify and coordinate training, employment and business development opportunities among the various stakeholders across northern Saskatchewan. At about the same time the North's three community colleges were amalgamated in 1987 to form the Northlands Regional College, and the NORTEP program was expanded to offer arts and science university courses. As well, a new *Northern Municipalities Act* was passed in 1983, largely based on the "Options 80" consultations initiated in the DNS era. The Act established new tiers of local governance (settlements, hamlets, villages, towns) and provided for a greater level of local decision making. It also allowed for the establishment of the Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account, an account that is used to manage municipal type revenues received by the province from Crown lands.[77]

The Northern Development Advisory Council and Northern Affairs Secretariat structures remained in place until 1991. With the election of a new government that year, new approaches to addressing the distinct needs and opportunities of the North began to emerge.

[Photographs courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

The 1990s - Preparing For A New Century

A Strong and Diversified Economy

As the 1980s came to a close, the outlook for the 1990s did not paint a positive picture for northern Saskatchewan. The newly elected New Democratic Party government in late 1991 faced a massive accumulation of debt as well as rising interest costs. Increased taxes and reduced government spending, rather than new or expanded programs, became priorities of the new government to ensure that the province could maintain fiscal stability.

Despite the province's fiscal preoccupation, critical northern needs had to be addressed. The government moved quickly to boost funding for particular northern priorities. The long-discussed multi-purpose regional health centre to replace the aging La Ronge hospital was approved by Cabinet and completed in 1996. Another critical area was water and sewer services for off-Reserve communities with First Nations Reserves a federal responsibility. In the eight years following disbandment of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan, provincial funding for northern water and sewer infrastructure had averaged only $1 million per year. In contrast, from 1991-92 to 1998-1999, provincial contributions to such infrastructure were increased by 250 per cent. Provincial government budget allocations for northern sewer and water services would be doubled again for a five-year program announced in 2000-2001.[78]

Beyond pressing issues that needed immediate action, northern leaders and the province were aware that a new development strategy would be required if continuing North-South disparities were to be more effectively addressed.

These disparities were given an up-dated profile through the deliberations of a Joint Federal-Provincial Panel on Uranium Mining Developments in Northern Saskatchewan. The Panel had been formed in 1991 to review the environmental impact of a number of new uranium mining projects that had been proposed by the industry – the McArthur River, McLean Lake, Cigar Lake, and Midwest mines as well as the mine expansion at Cluff Lake. The Panel's review process included public hearings in northern and southern communities. Through that process, northerners spoke to the issues of continuing high unemployment rates and living conditions that often lagged behind the rest of the province.

The government responded to socio-economic observations included in the Panel's first report in 1993 with commitments to establish Environmental Quality Committees and an inter-departmental Northern Mines Monitoring Secretariat to improve the provision of public information and community participation in the monitoring of all aspects of mining activity in northern Saskatchewan. The government announced it would introduce a new program to increase northern participation in business development – one that would facilitate increased northern economic benefits associated with mining developments.

The province also announced its support for a $10.5 million, five-year Multi-Party Training Plan that had been developed by the Northern Labour Market Committee as a concerted effort to increase northern employment in the mining sector.[79]

Northerners undergoing training in one of the many uranium mines in the North. *(Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs)*

A number of northern leaders appearing before the Panel suggested some sort of regional "revenue sharing" tied to uranium mining should be instituted. In light of their recommendations to conditionally proceed with several new mining developments, in 1997 the Panel specifically called upon the federal and provincial governments to work with northerners to address continuing socio-economic issues, including the idea of revenue-sharing. The province accepted the recommendation and, in May 1997, instituted a process dubbed the "Dialogue with Northern Leaders". It was a dialogue that would lead to a common Northern Strategy.

By 1995, the government had eliminated its annual deficit and was in a better position to give consideration to longer-term strategies. Early that year (and consistent with its response to the Federal-Provincial Uranium Panel), the government created a Northern Development Fund to make grants and loans available to northern-owned business enterprises and support the establishment of community-based regional economic development organizations (CREDOs) throughout the North.

Late in 1995, the provincial Cabinet created an Office of Northern Affairs. The new agency would manage and coordinate the northern-specific programs that had been created (Environmental Quality Committees, Northern Mines Monitoring Secretariat, Multi-Party Training Plan and Northern Development Fund), take responsibility for mineral sector surface lease agreements that had been instituted by DNS in the 1970s, and of particular importance, coordinate the development of a comprehensive long-term strategy to address North-South disparities.[80]

Keith Goulet, MLA representing Cumberland Constituency, was appointed Minister. Early in 1996, a Deputy Minister was appointed and headquartered in La Ronge. The government's new northern initiatives were transferred to the new entity and a new focal point was created to work with northerners, provincial and federal agencies, and industry to take stock of northern priorities and begin preparation of a long-term development strategy. In 1997, when the government established the *Dialogue with Northern Leaders* to develop consensus on such a strategy, the Office of Northern Affairs would take the lead role on behalf of the province.

Northern Affairs was not intended to replicate the integrated approach taken by the Department of Northern Saskatchewan in the 1970s. Fiscal circumstances would not permit such an approach in the 1990s. The merits of working in partnership with northerners, northern institutions, various provincial and federal agencies, and industry was a philosophy stressed by all parties – one that had been ably demonstrated through the first Multi-Party Training Plan for the mining sector.

The Northern Strategy

The Northern Strategy originated in 1997 through the *Dialogue with Northern Leaders.* The Premier, Minister of Northern Affairs and other members of Cabinet met with leaders of northern First Nations, municipalities and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan to discuss socio-economic issues identified through the Federal-Provincial Uranium Panel reports of 1993-1997. After several months of consultations among the parties, including federal government officials, a number of common priorities emerged. Of critical importance was the need for northern job creation to reverse the chronic underemployment that faced many northerners and to meet the challenge of many young people being added to the labour force by 2010 and beyond.[81] Jobs would provide income that would

Job training is essential in providing both social and economic opportunities for northerners.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

strengthen the ability of northern communities to regain greater self-reliance and capacity to improve the quality of life. Providing more jobs for northern people could be achieved through expansion and diversification of the northern economy; which in turn would improve northern infrastructure and capacity-building for northern people. Capacity-building was defined as increased education and job training, strengthened leadership and management skills, and family and community healing where necessary.

Armed with the above priorities, and other observations included in the "Dialogue" report, the provincial government drafted a Northern Strategy "framework" for consideration by northern leaders. In 1998, the Premier and Cabinet members again met with northern leaders, reviewed and amended the draft Strategy, and signed a Northern Strategy Memorandum of Understanding to take new initiatives that would support common goals and objectives.[82] Reflecting the "Dialogue" recommendations, priority was placed on identifying specific economic development opportunities, related infrastructure and capacity-building requirements, and the means to provide and attract the equity investment necessary to take advantage of northern economic opportunities. An Interim Northern Development Board with members nominated by the Prince Albert Grand Council, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, northern districts of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities, and the Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation, was created by the province, and a Strategic Opportunities Assessment undertaken in 1999 and 2000.

The Northern Strategy proposal for a federal-provincial Northern Development Agreement, including creation of a continuing Northern Development Board to participate in government coordination and priority setting, has taken longer to implement but remains a priority for the Province today. In the meantime, provincial departments and agencies, working with northern organizations and authorities, continue initiatives consistent with the Northern Strategy. Estimated annual provincial government expenditures, grants and transfers directly within the Northern Administration District, indicate steady growth from $145 million in 1992-93 to approximately $267 million in 2000-2001.[83]

The 20th century closed with northerners demonstrating cooperation and consensus on expectations and priorities. The people of northern Saskatchewan look to northern, provincial and federal leaders to maintain the momentum of the Northern Strategy as a means to end Saskatchewan's North-South inequities of the past hundred years.

Governance

The colonial history of northern Saskatchewan could only end when northerners regained influence, participation and authority in the institutions that directly affect their lives – municipal and regional governments, the provision of public services, and the local economy. The fur block councils of the 1940s, the emergence of northern co-operatives, the introduction and expansion of community councils in the 1960s and 1970s, the development and election of school boards

and post-secondary services in the 1970s, the restructuring of municipal government in the 1980s, and the accompanying growth in authority and accountability of First Nations band councils have helped northerners achieve governance participation comparable to that enjoyed by most Canadians.

During the 1990s, the process of increasing northern direction of northern affairs continued. Regional Health districts were created through the devolution of responsibilities held by the provincial Health department. Through various boards and committees established during the past decade, northerners are now making decisions on the use of training budgets and programs, housing development and allocation policies, transportation planning and priorities, and economic development initiatives.

The provincial Municipal Affairs department, with assistance from the Office of Northern Affairs and leadership from the Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities, initiated "Northern Municipal Roundtable" meetings in 1996 in which municipal leaders regularly meet with Cabinet Ministers to discuss local and regional concerns. The Association emerged from the first Roundtable and, reflecting its aspirations, the organization was dubbed "New North".[84]

Since 1996, New North has served as a collective voice for northern communities, facilitating northern participation in provincial-municipal planning. Northern participation in governance was strengthened with a full-time Minister and Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs – ensuring that northern perspectives and issues were addressed at Cabinet and senior management tables of the provincial government.

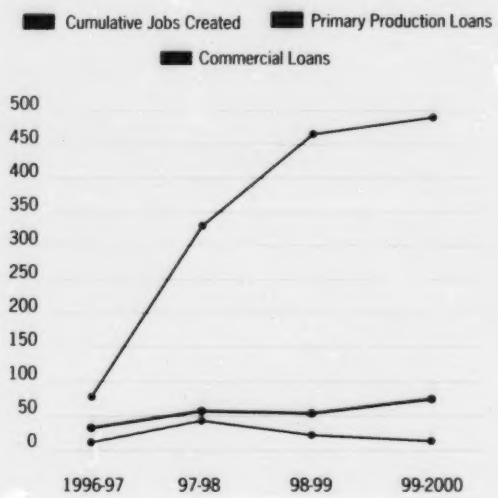
Various forms of self-governance and shared decision-making will continue to evolve in the North. The Minister of Northern Affairs had suggested that economic self-determination is the new focus for ensuring that northerners are able to guide the further evolution of their society. To that end, the Northern Strategy and the province place priority on further developing and diversifying the northern economy.

Economic Development

The 1990s was a period of significant growth for northern participation in the economy – through employment and through northern enterprises. The greatest impact has been felt in the mining sector but other sectors are also developing – including retail, construction, forestry, transportation, and tourism.

Creation of the Northern Development Fund (NDF) administered by the Office of Northern Affairs, provided a new source of loan capital and grants for northern-owned companies and regional economic development agencies. From 1995 to 2001 the Fund has provided northerners with $10.5 million in commercial and primary production loans. The Fund also provides approximately $900,000 each year in grants for research, marketing and skill development. The NDF complements traditional funding agencies, the federally-sponsored Community Futures Program, and First Nation and Métis programs that support economic development in the North. It is estimated that NDF funding has facilitated more than 500 jobs within Saskatchewan's Northern Administration District.[85]

Contributions of the Northern Development Fund



Information provided by Saskatchewan Northern Affairs

Community Based Economic Development – Success Stories

There are many genuine northern Saskatchewan success stories. Local economic development initiatives from various First Nations bands throughout the Northern Administration District exemplify this success. There are several business arms of First Nations bands throughout the North that have only a short history but a long list of accomplishments. Two of those success stories are the Kitsaki Development Corporation (KDC), and the recently created Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation (AEDTC).

Kitsaki Development Corporation

As early as the 1970s, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band was beginning to recognize the importance of the economic development in the North. As the band members pursued business formation interests in the La Ronge area, uranium development was becoming important in providing economic development activity in northern Saskatchewan. By 1980 the band decided to form a limited company with shares owned by Council members and controlled by the Chief. Soon, the Kitsaki Development Corporation (KDC) was formed on December 14, 1981.

*After establishing itself KDC pursued another venture in 1986 with Calgary-based Trimac Transportation to officially form Northern Resource Trucking (NRT), only one of the many sectors of KDC's operations. By broadening its base and selling 41 per cent of its shares to surrounding northern communities in 1994, NRT managed to secure a six-year hauling contract with Cameco, and a three-year contract with Cogema Resources meaning two full-time contracts to haul uranium in and out of northern mines. Today you would be hard pressed driving in northern Saskatchewan without coming across a NRT truck hauling goods in northern Saskatchewan. Within five years KDC founded a company called First Nations Insurance which started to offer a full line of insurance and investment needs. It was during this time that KDC rented a vacant building to an entrepreneur interested in processing beef jerky. Not long after the business started, KDC bought out the company to form Kitsaki Meats. In 1990 KDC became more involved in the northern economy by purchasing the La Ronge Motor Hotel, La Ronge Industries, a catering business, and establishing Northern Lights Wild Rice Inc., Wapawekka Lumber and other ventures. The Kitsaki Development Corporation today employs more than 110 Lac La Ronge Indian Band members as well as countless more in the surrounding settlements and communities in northern Saskatchewan. If the sales were added up from each KDC business over an entire year it would total approximately $54 million. Much of the income is distributed back into the community in a variety of ways. KDC is instrumental in the growth of northern Saskatchewan.**

Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation

In March 1998, members of the AEDTC held their inaugural meeting to create a benchmark body of representatives for future development corporations in the North. The purpose of the formation of the AEDTC is to facilitate and coordinate economic and training activities within the Athabasca region of northern Saskatchewan. These activities help support and increase job creation, promote and create economic development that is sensitive to northern needs and priorities, and to create partnerships and improve the delivery of various programs and agencies that exist in the North.

The AEDTC serves seven communities in the Athabasca region. Its members strive to create and develop ways to address some of the critical issues this region faces in comparison to other jurisdictions throughout the province: high costs of living, a challenging transportation system, and employment opportunities for northerners.

In 2000-2001 the AEDTC was involved in several activities throughout the Athabasca Basin that involved northerners, and provided valuable dialogue between members of the AEDTC, industry, and government.

- *July 2000 – Met with government officials (federal and provincial), industry, and First Nations leaders to improve transportation systems in the region.*
- *Involved in the construction of staff facilities at the McClean Lake mine site and road improvements in the Athabasca Basin.*
- *Involvement in the construction of a new Fish Plant in the community of Wollaston Lake.*
- *Hosted the 1st Athabasca Roundtable in Saskatoon March 8, 2001.*
- *Commissioned a Transportation Study detailing the needs and requirements in the Athabasca Basin.*
- *Completed year two of the seasonal road maintenance from Points North to Black Lake, Stony Rapids to Fond du Lac, and Fond du Lac to Uranium City.*

*The AEDTC has existed only a short time, but its members have long been established in this area. In partnership with government and industry the AEDTC looks forward to a bright future in Saskatchewan's North.***

*Information on Kitsaki Development Corporation taken from, Otuyumow, Kitsaki Sawmill Project More than Just Lumber, Summer 2000, p. 5.
**Information on AEDTC taken from the AEDTC Annual Report 2000-2001.

Mining

Northern Saskatchewan is a primary international source of uranium used for nuclear energy generation. More than 30 per cent of the world's annual production originates in this province. Some gold and copper zinc is mined in northern Saskatchewan and a silica sand development is proceeding in northeast Saskatchewan.

The province works closely and co-operatively with the mining industry to ensure its long-term viability and economic operation. Recent initiatives include the implementation of new royalty regimes, tax credits for mining and exploration investment, federal and provincial funded geoscience programs and participation in the Joint Federal-Provincial environmental review process approving new operations. A current major initiative is to reduce the overlap and duplication of regulation of uranium mines by the federal and provincial governments. The governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding and have established a working group to harmonize their regulatory regimes.[86]

The province has partnered with the mining industry to link land tenure with commitments to broad socio-economic objectives. In addition to providing land tenure to mining companies, the Mineral Surface Lease Agreements include comprehensive provisions that address environmental protection, occupational health and safety codes, and socio-economic benefits for northern residents. Through consultation with northern representatives and mining officials, the agreements now require mining companies to negotiate long term human resource development plans which focus on employment, training and local business development. These agreements, supported by the mineral sector Multi-Party Training Plan (MPTP), resulted in significant growth in northern employment and northern and joint-venture business contracts during the 1990s as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

The MPTP, which was initiated in 1993 and renewed in 1998, represents a partnership among the industry, the province, the federal government, Aboriginal agencies, and training institutions. It is a training-to-employment initiative that provides northerners with the knowledge and skills to obtain employment in the mining industry. It has helped give northern Saskatchewan the highest rate of Aboriginal employment in mining of any region in Canada.

Figure 1

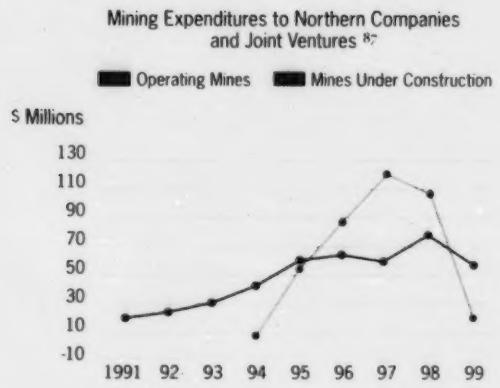
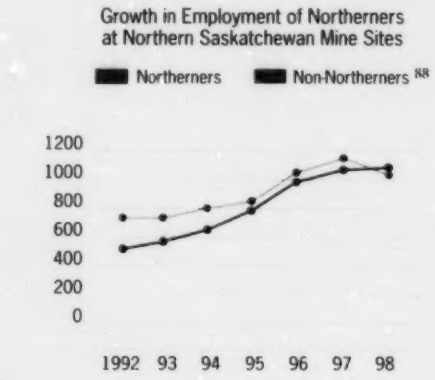


Figure 2



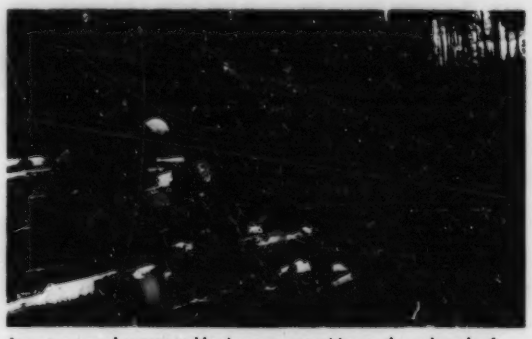
Other direct and indirect benefits are realized by northerners from the mining industry. The Northern Revenue Sharing Trust Account, funded by property tax revenues from remote properties, primarily mines, in northern Saskatchewan, distributes funds to northern municipalities for capital projects and services. Secondary impacts include improvements to infrastructure such as roads and power transmission lines.

From construction to reclamation, minimizing the impact of a mine on the environment has been a primary goal of the province. Environmental monitoring of uranium mining is an important element in achieving that goal. As previously noted, in 1993 the province established three regional Environmental Quality Committees

(EQCs) in northern Saskatchewan, in which 29 northern communities participate, and a Northern Mines Monitoring Secretariat, which facilitates support for the EQCs and information sharing by all regulatory agencies.

Forestry

In 1999, the government announced its forest economic development strategy based on three principles: ecosystem sustainability; enhanced participation by northerners and Aboriginal communities; and expansion of value-added forest-based manufacturing. The strategy was developed after the province undertook a major analysis of its forest resources and their management. Through a review of "wood supply" allocations under existing



Long term employment and business opportunities are the end result of Saskatchewan's partnerships that have developed in the forest industry. *[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]*

Forest Management Agreements and an independent inventory assessment of the province's forestry resource, it was determined that Saskatchewan could significantly increase its harvest while maintaining sustainable supplies.[89] By applying the regulations of the new *Forest Resources Management Act* adopted by the government, increased commercial harvesting will actually help address old-growth problems of fire hazards and insect infestation while creating new economic opportunities.

Within the Northern Administration District the government's allocation of available wood supplies was made in a manner that ensures northern communities, working with industrial partners, are directly involved in the development and management of the resource in their areas. The Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, a consortium of northwest Métis communities operating as North West Communities Wood Products Ltd., and Green Lake Métis Wood Products, are all involved in value-added projects which will create long-term business and employment opportunities. Northern Affairs has provided loan and grant funds to assist several of the northern proponents to develop forestry business plans. Owing to the integrated management of hardwood, softwood and waste products, northern contractors and companies will also participate in larger projects such as the oriented strand board plants built at Hudson Bay and proceeding at Meadow Lake.[90]

Forestry expansion during the past few years has also included a major expansion of the Weyerhaeuser Canada lumber mill at Big River and the Weyerhaeuser partnership with three northern First Nations to create the ultra-modern $22 million Wapawekka mill north of Prince Albert.[91]

An estimated private sector investment of $850 million and creation of 3,000 direct jobs over the next few years will have a significant impact on the economy of the North and the province overall. Building on the success of partnerships with the mining sector, the government is currently considering requirements that each major forestry development project include specific human and community development plans to ensure northern and Aboriginal employment and benefits.

Tourism

Sport fishing became a tourism growth industry in the post-war years – sometimes competing for sustainable fish supplies with the commercial fishing industry. In later years, big game outfitting took on increasing importance in this sector. Today there are about 250 licensed fish and game outfitters in northern Saskatchewan.[92]

Tourism was the theme for the Northern Saskatchewan Business Opportunities Forum held in La Ronge in 1998. (The forum is an annual event initiated by Saskatchewan Northern Affairs in co-operation with industry and other agencies.) The enthusiasm generated by the tourism discussions led to creation of a Northern Saskatchewan Tourism Task Team. Through the Team, and with the participation of Tourism Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Outfitters Association, Saskatchewan Northern Affairs has been supporting an analysis of the northern tourism sector leading to preparation of a comprehensive tourism development plan.[93] It is expected that ecotourism will play a significant role in northern tourism expansion providing urban-dwellers with non-consumptive nature and cultural experiences.

Trophy angling is only one of the many tourist activities northern Saskatchewan has to offer.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

Cultural Tourism is one of the many opportunities available to northerners. Stanley Mission elders Flora Charles (left), Rosie Charles (next), Elizabeth Charles (seated) and Helen Visentinme (seated right) help Lois Dalby of the La Ronge Historical Society and Margaret Hanna by sharing their recollections of the old village of Stanley Mission that was being excavated in 2001 near the Holy Trinity Anglican Church.
[Photograph courtesy of Aurora Communications]

Primary Production

Primary production is commercial fishing, trapping, wild rice production and natural products such as wild mushrooms, berries and other non-timber forest products. Continued participation in these traditional activities is encouraged by Northern Affairs by increasing accessibility for younger northerners to Northern Development Fund loans to acquire equipment and supplies.

In cooperation with commercial fishers and the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, Saskatchewan Northern Affairs and Saskatchewan Environment are pursuing a revitalization of the commercial fishing industry in northern Saskatchewan. An immediate target is to double the value of the annual harvest from $5 million to $10 million. It is anticipated that demand for freshwater fish will grow particularly as an alternative to red meat consumption. Northern Affairs has taken a number of initiatives to assist northern communities to participate in sustainable expansion of the industry:

Commercial fishing is a family tradition for Tom Bird and his son Simon from Southend, Saskatchewan.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

- A one-year lakeside infrastructure program was implemented in 2000, providing $700,000 to improve fish-packing facilities and maintain product quality;

Commercial fishing is a vital component of northern Saskatchewan's economy.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

- Maintenance of the Commercial Fishing Freight Subsidy Program to offset high transportation costs for fish shipped from more distant and remote lakes;

- Assistance to establish or restore local fishing co-operatives in northern communities;

- An assessment of the potential for increasing commercial fish supplies through the use of aquaculture in designated natural lake bodies in the North; and

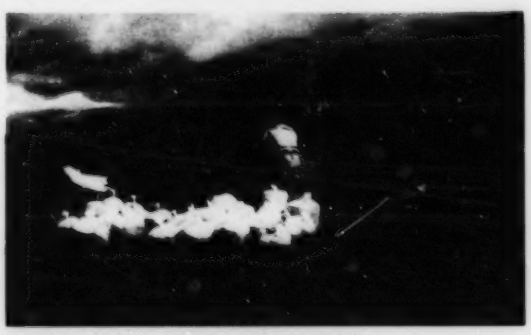
- An assessment of the potential to increase the level of processing and marketing of Saskatchewan's commercial fish harvest, reducing reliance on the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.[94]

The two assessment projects noted are examples of Strategic Opportunities Assessment studies that have been undertaken under the auspices of the Interim Northern Development Board as part of the Northern Strategy.

Three hundred years of history have shown that the fur industry and the potential of trapping are always subject to the whims of the fashion trade. While trapping will most likely not return to its importance of past years, the fur industry provides an opportunity for many northerners to supplement their income and maintain a lifestyle in harmony with nature. Regulated trapping also assists in maintaining the health and stocks of wildlife.

During the 1990s, the Saskatchewan government, in co-operation with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Saskatchewan Indian and Métis War Veterans Association, helped avoid a ban by the European Union on much of the Canadian fur harvest by supporting an Agreement on International Humane Trapping Standards. The Minister of Northern Affairs led a delegation to Europe in 1996 to explain the Agreement and the commitment of Canadian governments to ensure testing and use of humane traps.[95]

Wild rice harvesting in northern Saskatchewan dates back to the 1930s, when it was introduced as feed for a muskrat population facing drought conditions. Its development as a growth industry was an initiative of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan.[96] A ten-fold increase in production by 1983 resulted from a joint federal-provincial undertaking in 1980 that provided seed to more than 200 northerners. By 1998, northern Saskatchewan had become the largest wild rice producing region in Canada, marketing three million pounds at a value of $2.12 million. The industry has also spawned processing and packaging plants in La Ronge and Denare Beach.[97]



Bringing in a harvest of wild rice at Meeyomoot Lake.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

During the 1990s, Saskatchewan Northern Affairs and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food provided assistance for the organization and operation of a Saskatchewan Wild Rice Council and for the development of new marketing plans. Given competition from paddy-grown rice in the United States, the Council is seeking the means by which northern Saskatchewan's natural lake harvest can be certified and marketed as a premium organic product.

Social and Community Development

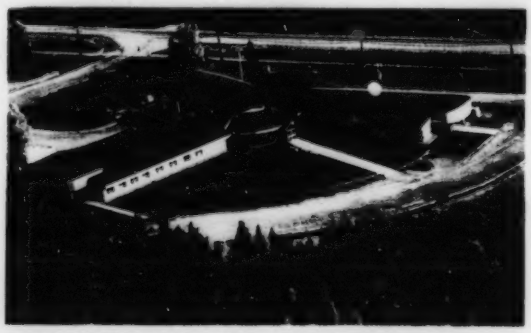
Education

Education in Saskatchewan's North continues to be a primary focus for the provincial government to ensure northerners develop the skills to more fully participate in the provincial economy and to increase family and community self-reliance. This is particularly important in a region where 37 per cent of the population is under the age of 15, compared with the province-wide figure of 22 per cent.[98]

Provincial government expenditures for northern education – primarily grants to schools, Northlands College and associated programs – grew from $37.7 million in 1992-93 to $48.9 million in 2000-2001. Part of the increase enabled school divisions to increase the use of culturally relevant teaching materials, to develop new initiatives to increase the number of northern students completing high school, and to develop community school programs. By the end of the decade the annual provincial contribution to 10 designated northern community schools was $1 million – money used to strengthen community participation in making education relevant and successful for northern students.

One reason for increasing northern education budgets is the increased enrolment occurring from kindergarten to grade twelve. From 1988 to 1998, the number of northern students enrolled in these grades increased by 29 per cent (7,955 to 10,249) compared to an entire increase across the province of only 3 per cent.[99] Between 1991 and 1996, Saskatchewan's net population increase was less than 1 per cent. During the same period in the North, the net population grew by more than 16 per cent.

Adult Education has improved dramatically in northern Saskatchewan with the NORTEP/NORPAC programs. Former Minister of Post Secondary Education and Skills Training Glenn Hagel (left), shakes hands with Bruce Ruelling, chair of the NORTEP/NORPAC Council, with former Northern Affairs Minister Keith Goulet (standing left) and NORTEP/NORPAC Director Elie Fleury (standing right) looking on.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

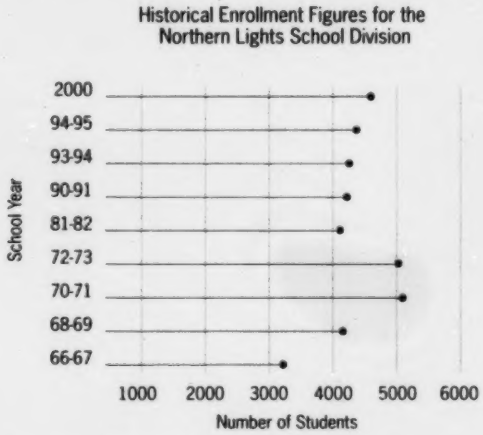


Northlands Regional College, La Ronge, Saskatchewan.
[Photograph courtesy of Woodland Aerial Photography]

The education gap between the North and the South is narrowing. The number of northerners 15 years and older having less than a grade nine education has fallen from 43 per cent in 1986, to 36 per cent in 1991, and again to 30 per cent in 1996.[100] The overall number of northerners going on to and completing post-secondary courses has also increased. The number of northern residents holding a grade twelve certificate, trades certificate, post-secondary courses, or a degree has grown from approximately 4,900 individuals in 1986 to 8,000 10 years later – an increase of more than 60 per cent.[101] The need to further increase northern participation in post secondary education is evident given that only 45 per cent of northerners between the ages of 15 to 24 are participating in post-secondary education compared with 58 per cent provincially.[102]

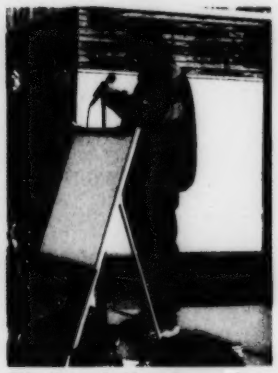
In addition to the three northern school divisions and schools operated by First Nations, a variety of organizations are contributing to advances in education and skill development in the North.

Northlands College maintains facilities in Buffalo Narrows, La Ronge and Creighton and also delivers courses in other northern communities. During the past decade its annual program offerings have increased substantially. Northlands College works closely with the provincial universities, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology and, for distance learning programs, the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN), which links classrooms to students via satellite and Internet technology. Essentially, a student in northern Saskatchewan can enroll for a particular course as would any other student in Saskatchewan and attend classes at the regional college or any other centre throughout the North that has a communications facility.[103]



Information provided by Northern Lights School Division

Educational institutions, together with industry, government departments, and Aboriginal and northern organizations, continue to contribute to the second five-year, $13 million mineral sector Multi-Party Training Plan, described in the Economic Development (mining) section of this report. These training agencies, in association with the Northern Labour Market Committee, are also involved in the development and delivery of new training programs related to planned growth in the forestry sector of the northern economy during the next few years. For 1999-2000, the province allocated $750,000 for specific forestry training programs with a further increase of $109,000 in 2001.



Elder George Smith speaks to students at the sod turning ceremony of the new school at Pinehouse Lake, Saskatchewan.

Since its creation in 1976, the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP), based in La Ronge, has gained national and international recognition as one of the most successful Indian and Métis education programs in Canada. By 2000, the program had 245 graduates. More than 80 per cent are employed in the education field contributing to the Northern Lights School Division's success in increasing its Aboriginal employees from 3 per cent to 25 per cent during the period of NORTEP's operation.[104] The Northern Professional Access Program (NORPAC) offers first and second year arts and science classes in La Ronge and has recently added introductory university engineering courses.

Building on the success of NORTEP and NORPAC, and in recognition of northern employment opportunities in the health sector, Saskatchewan Health recently announced its support for development of a Northern Health Access program to increase the number of northerners becoming health and science professionals.

Complementing the education sector in northern Saskatchewan are the recently established Canada-Saskatchewan Career and Employment Service Centres in La Ronge, Ile à la Crosse and Creighton. The Centres, in conjunction with other outreach agencies in other communities, provide access to career and employment information for job seekers and potential students. They also assist employers who are looking for workers.

Advancements in northern education and career development are being supported by advancements in computer and Internet technology. CommunityNet, a partnership among education, health, executive government and some federal funding, will connect 366 Saskatchewan communities to high-speed Internet services. More than 30 northern centres will receive the

Computer skills are essential in northern training initiatives.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

new service via SCN's satellite transponder.[105] Connections will be made to all educational institutions as well as health care facilities and government offices. The recent launch of CommunityNet makes Saskatchewan one of the few jurisdictions in North America to develop such a comprehensive high-speed network. The result will be that some of Saskatchewan's small communities will have a higher level of Internet connectivity than is available in parts of downtown Toronto.

Combined with the Headwaters "smart communities" demonstration project (one of 12 across Canada being sponsored by Industry Canada), northern Saskatchewan will be a leading region in Canada for applying computer and Internet technology as the new century begins. The project is being managed by the Keewatin Career Development Corporation and will involve educational, entrepreneurial, cultural and community service applications of the technology.

Mary MacDonald of the Gordon Denny Community School Elders Program, teaches student Bella Hatland embroidery.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

Tremendous improvements have been made in the past decade. Internet access and satellite colleges in many locations throughout the North offer northerners the chance to educate themselves in fields of interest that were not accessible prior to the 1990s – to be on a more level playing field with students in southern regions of the province.

Health

Provincial government health services in northern Saskatchewan evolved from a cornerstone of "outpost hospitals" established in strategic locations throughout northern Saskatchewan in the 1940s and 1950s and by Roman Catholic mission hospitals established in Ile à la Crosse and La Loche. By the early 1990s, the activities of the Northern Health Services Branch of Saskatchewan Health continued to be largely centred on these same communities. The Department expanded to include primary care nursing, public health nursing, public health inspection, a children's dental program, home care, health education, communicable disease control, mental health and addictions services. Conventional hospital services were provided in La Loche, Ile à la Crosse, Uranium City and La Ronge. Private medical clinics provided physician services based in La Loche and La Ronge. The Northern Medical Services unit of the University of Saskatchewan's College of Medicine provided physicians to work in Uranium City and Ile à la Crosse.

Healthy communities ensure the growth and protection of our most valuable resource – our children.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

The province undertook significant program enhancements during the 1990s, prior to facilitating transfer of responsibilities, for most northern health services, to two new health districts.

Increased provincial budget allocations (7.3 per cent in 1997-98 alone) permitted provision of several additional mental health social workers and public health nursing positions; the introduction of community support workers; establishment of the Acquired Brain Injury Program; establishment of the Problem Gambling Program; and expanded home care services. More than $1 million in additional funding increased the availability of physician services in the North, including integration of the La Ronge clinic into the University of Saskatchewan Northern Medical Services support system. As well, the long-discussed replacement of the La Ronge Hospital with a new integrated health facility (including provision of new long-term care beds and an addictions detox unit) was completed in 1996 at a cost of $10.6 million. The total cost for the project was covered through provincial funding and local fund raising activities.

As part of the reorganization of health services that occurred in Saskatchewan during the 1990s, and complementary to federal health services provided through First Nations tribal councils, a community-based planning process resulted in the establishment of two district health boards

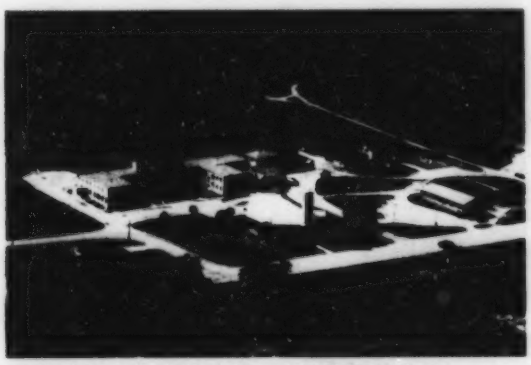
The La Ronge Health Centre after its completion in 1996.
[Photograph courtesy of Woodland Aerial Photography]

within the Northern Administration District - Keewatin Yatthé District Health Board (KYHD) and the Mamawetan Churchill River District Health Board (MCRHD) – and creation of the Athabasca Health Authority (AHA).[106] Transfer of responsibility for health service delivery to the Mamawetan Churchill River and Keewatin Yatthé Health Districts was completed in 1998.

The KYHD provides health services for the northwest part of Saskatchewan including 10 communities from Green Lake to La Loche.[107] The district operates hospitals in Ile à la Crosse and La Loche that provide basic medical service, 24-hour emergency service, and laboratory and x-ray services. The two community health centres, located in Beauval and Buffalo Narrows, provide basic primary care nursing service including 24-hour on-call emergency response, and accessibility to home care services, mental health counselling and therapy, health promotion and medical transportation.[108] Connecting these health centres and hospitals to each other and the rest of the province are four recently established ambulance response teams originating from Beauval, Ile à la Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, and La Loche.

Since its inception in 1998, KYHD has been responsible for working with Saskatchewan Health in the planning and building of a new integrated health facility in La Loche. This facility houses acute care, physician's clinic, public health services, mental health and addictions services and add long-term care and addictions detox beds. The new health centre in La Loche, at a cost of approximately $11.2 million, was completed in the fall of 2001. La Loche residents raised funds to help the government cover the cost of the entire project.

The MCRHD is the largest health district in the North encompassing a total area of 133,900 square kilometres, serving approximately 20,500 residents in the central and northeastern regions of the North. The district's only hospital is located in



The Ile à la Crosse hospital in the Keewatin Yatthé Health District.
[Photograph courtesy of Woodland Aerial Photography]

Saskatchewan Health Districts (1998).

La Ronge, with two primary health centres located in Pinehouse Lake and Sandy Bay. On the eastern side of the district the Sandy Bay/Creighton areas receive medical services from a hospital located in neighbouring Flin Flon, Manitoba.[109]

Long term care in this district is provided in La Ronge while home care services are offered in communities such as Weyakwin, Pinehouse Lake, Sandy Bay, Creighton, La Ronge and several First Nations communities offering services on several reserves. In addition to the addiction rehabilitation service, physiotherapy and acquired brain injury rehabilitation is offered from La Ronge.[110]

A home care worker (right) making a routine visit.
(Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs)

The most northern health district in the province is the Athabasca Health Authority. It covers a total of 59,680 square km extending to the NWT/Nunavut border. The AHA includes the communities of Black Lake, Fond du Lac, Camsell Portage, Stony Rapids, and Uranium City. The total population of the district is approximately 2,400. The Athabasca seasonal road connects the communities of Stony Rapids and Black Lake to the rest of the province but because it traverses a variety of terrain the road is only easily accessible during the winter months. All the remaining communities in this district are accessible only by boat or aircraft.

The Athabasca Health Authority is a truly unique organization. Formed under the Non-Profit Corporations Act, the Athabasca Health Authority brings together funding from both the province and federal/First Nations health agencies. In this manner, the AHA is developing a coordinated process in which it can provide one system of health care delivery to residents. The Authority has a board of directors to develop this project but, in the interim, health care services are being managed by the Mamawetan Churchill River Health District. Services currently provided under this arrangement include primary care nursing, mental health and addiction services based in Stony Rapids with visiting services provided to Uranium City and Camsell Portage. First Nation bands provide primary care nursing services and mental health services to individuals in Black Lake and Fond du Lac.[111]

The only hospital in the Athabasca Basin is located at Uranium City. The Athabasca Health Authority has completed planning for its replacement with an integrated facility located on the Chicken Reserve adjacent to Stony Rapids. This location was chosen because the greatest portion of the area population now resides in the communities of Black Lake and Stony Rapids. Services at the new facility will include acute care, long term care, a physician's clinic and a broad range of community health services.

To maximize limited resources, the two northern districts along with the AHA formed a co-management partnership to co-ordinate some shared services such as dental health education, nutrition services, and child behaviour management services. This agreement includes the Population Health Unit which co-ordinates medical health officer duties, communicable and chronic disease control measures and environmental health services. Additional funding has been provided for the Population Health Unit to establish the Sexual Wellness initiative and for a joint initiative to promote healthy lifestyles and prevention of diabetes in northern Saskatchewan residents.

During the late 1990s, the Mamawetan and Keewatin Yatthé Health Districts, together with several other health districts in the province, initiated the Northern Telehealth Network to use video-conferencing technology to link northern and rural locations to specialist services in larger centres. The system permits remote consultation with physicians, including assessment of x-ray and ultrasound tests. It also facilitates delivery of education programs for patients and health professionals.

In May 1997, the provincial government established the Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Diabetes in response to an increasing number of people – particularly Aboriginal residents – with the disease.[112] After three years of extensive consultation throughout the province, the Committee concluded that several steps have to be taken to bring diabetes under control. Some of the key recommendations of the committee include:

- Provide public education about prevention strategies that can delay or prevent the onset of Type 2 diabetes.
- Focus on physical activity, healthy body weight, better diets, and positive lifestyle habits.
- Ensure optimal services are available and affordable.
- Increase the understanding of diabetes and develop benchmark indicators for prevention.
- Develop a culturally sensitive, community based, holistic model of prevention strategies to reduce the incidence of the disease.[113]

In 2000 the two northern health districts and the AHA joined forces with a number of other agencies such as Prince Albert Grand Council, Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and a Northern Recreation Co-ordinating Committee to develop a campaign to fight diabetes among northern residents. The campaign *Working Together for a Brighter Tomorrow* worked with several different media groups, including the Missinipi Broadcast-ing Corporation, to promote and increase the awareness to northern residents that diabetes is preventable. Saskatchewan Health provided $166,000 over three years for the educational project.[114]

As in other regions of the province, in the 1990s northern health districts placed new emphasis and importance on preventative education as a key component of effective health care.

Social Services

A priority of the government during the 1990s was the Action Plan for Children – with emphasis on reducing poverty and its impacts, and strengthening early childhood programs for children at risk. In 1998 the Saskatchewan Child Benefit, Employment Supplement and Family Health

Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation – Success Story

Communication and the delivery of information in Saskatchewan's North have been challenging. Northerners have shown true initiative in the establishment of the Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation. By the 1970s, radio and television programming became more common as northerners gained access to public programs that provided a reliable source for information and entertainment. One of the difficulties with this form of programming was its content. All of the stations broadcasting programs were based in southern regions and many of the topics were not relevant to northerners or were not being broadcast in the language spoken in northern regions. Initially CKBI radio in Prince Albert aired a program daily called "Northern News" that contained stories and information of concern to residents of northern Saskatchewan. In the 1970's with the aid of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan, the program moved its location to La Ronge where it was independently produced by northerners employed by the Department of Northern Saskatchewan's Extension Services Branch. It was under this branch that local content was broadcast in English, Cree, and Dené to regions of the North where radio signals had never reached before. This branch also assisted northern communities in planning and operating local radio stations that could boost the original signal from La Ronge or start small radio stations of their own.

It was not until 1983 that northerners would have a radio station capable of creating its own programming. Under a federal government program aimed to enhance and protect cultural identity via broadcast programming, the Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was established. Upon receiving approval from its regulators, MBC elected its Board of Directors in 1984 and implemented a training program to hire northerners as technicians, announcers, and writers. Today MBC provides 10 hours of Cree language and five hours of Dené language programming to northern areas of the province and strives to integrate other languages into information or special programming. MBC is self-sufficient and is heard in more than 30 communities throughout Saskatchewan's North, more than 20 communities in northern Manitoba, and shares its programming with several other locations in Nunavut, the North West Territories, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario.

MBC is a true success story for northern Saskatchewan. It is a communications company started by northerners, staffed by northerners, and programmed by northerners to protect and enhance local cultures throughout northern Saskatchewan. *

* Information on Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation taken from MBC Website. http://www.mbcradio.com/history.html. September 11, 2001.

Benefits programs were introduced, and the Provincial Training Allowance adjusted, to assist lower income parents to remain in or join the workforce rather than falling onto social assistance to meet their children's basic needs. These programs have assisted northern families and, together with increased employment opportunities, have reduced welfare dependence. During the past seven years, a 24 per cent reduction in social assistance caseloads has occurred in an area that includes La Loche, Creighton, La Ronge, Buffalo Narrows and Meadow Lake.[115]

Social Services programs go well beyond social assistance. Services offered in northern Saskatchewan include adoption, foster care, young offender programs, child protection, and counselling for teen parents. New staff positions have been created in the North, and across the province, to better support child welfare programs.

Regional Social Services personnel, with staff from other departments and input from community groups, administer "prevention and support grants" to aid community projects that respond to needs of northern children and families. These grants are made possible by the pooling of funds from separate grant programs through education, health, justice and social services.

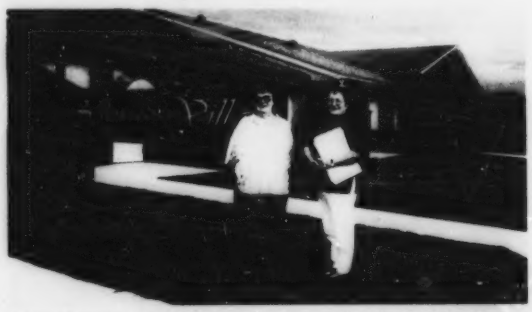
Disability issues in the North represent a unique challenge for the provincial agencies and programs that provide services to those people with physical challenges. Northerners took their own initiative to address these challenges by establishing the Gary Tinker Federation. The Federation is named after a Pinehouse Lake resident who was instrumental in bringing disability issues, specific to northerners, to the attention of the rest of the province. The Federation office provides a link between northern residents and provincial government support programs.[116]

Infrastructure

Housing

Although federal government participation in new home construction programs ended in the 1990s, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation (SHC) has continued to support this fundamental requirement for northern families. (Housing in First Nations Reserve communities is undertaken by Band Councils through federal government funding allocations.) From 1990 to 2000, provincial government housing expenditures in northern Saskatchewan exceeded $80 million. This included:

- a massive repair and modernization program for the 1,800 low income housing units that form the Northern "social housing" inventory;
- provision of grants for repairs to privately owned homes under the Canada-Saskatchewan Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program; and
- construction of 588 housing units.[117]



Florence Hansen (right), Manager of the Beaver River Regional Housing Authority, visits long-time board member Mary Alcrow at the Sunrise Villa seniors home in Beauval.
[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]

Combined with $25 million in water and sewer construction over the same period and support for the development of new housing subdivisions in several communities, provincial programs and expenditures reflected the high priority families and municipalities place on improving the quality and availability of northern housing.

During the 1990s, the management of social housing (low income rental units) was increasingly transferred to local and regional non-profit housing authorities and corporations. Led by volunteer boards, the eight authorities were provided with training to increase their administrative and management capacities. By the end of the decade, they were managing 1,160 housing units.[118]

In addition to meeting social housing requirements, in recent years SHC encouraged northern home ownership by providing conditional grants to lower and moderate-income families who are able to finance modest mortgages. Some residents of social housing were assisted to move from rent to mortgages, buying the homes they had previously been renting for several years.

To help create traditional private rental housing markets in communities where such housing is in demand, a Rental Market Assistance Program was developed. The program provides conditional grants for new rental housing developed by private sector and non-profit agencies. To date, 93 units were built under the program in nine northern communities.

SHC and the regional housing authorities have developed policies to ensure northern companies are given the opportunity to bid on construction and repair contracts undertaken in the North. Northern firms now undertake more than half of SHC's contract work in northern Saskatchewan. The northern contracting practices of agencies such as SHC and Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation contribute to the government's Northern Procurement Policy put in place in 1999. The policy ensures that northern contractors and suppliers are always given the opportunity to bid on providing goods and services required by government agencies for their northern operations.

Transportation

In an area as vast as northern Saskatchewan, transportation infrastructure is of critical importance. Community access expectations, resource development needs and federal government policy decisions were key influences in determining how available funds would be applied to meeting northern transportation priorities during the past decade. Average annual expenditures for construction and maintenance increased between 1992 and 2000. Expenditures on road construction are much higher per kilometre than elsewhere in the province due to northern bedrock, sand and muskeg and longer distances between supply points.

The north's three road arteries – Highway 155 to La Loche and 955 further north; Highway 2 to La Ronge connecting to 102 and 905 leading to the northeast; and Highway 106 (the Hanson Lake Road) to the Manitoba border – serve as the north's transportation lifelines. They are critical for community access by residents and visitors and essential for mining and forestry. While traffic levels on other routes may be lower, they are equally important to those who depend on their use. The limitations of seasonal road access to several communities and the impact of long distances make airfield services particularly important to many northerners.

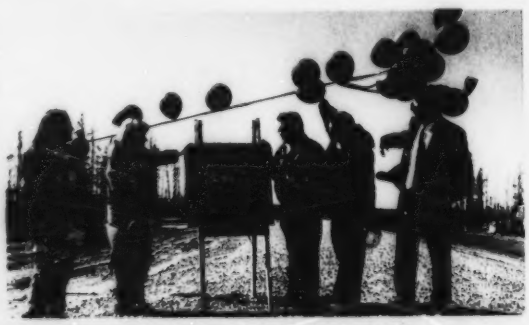
These competing demands, together with transportation costs faced throughout the province, make priority-setting difficult.

The federal government's decisions to cease operational responsibilities for airports in Canada led to particular changes in the operation of airfield facilities at La Ronge and Uranium City that had previously been contracted to the provincial Highways and Transportation department by Transport Canada. Fisheries and Oceans Canada served notice they were not prepared to maintain dredging and navigational aids on the Athabasca waterways that served communities from Camsell Portage to Black Lake.[119]

With these federal policy changes, the Town of La Ronge assumed ownership and operational responsibilities for the La Ronge airport once contributions to capital improvements were negotiated. The Uranium City airport became a direct provincial responsibility. After consultation with the Athabasca communities, it was agreed that a seasonal road would be built to link the end of Highway 905 (Points North) to the communities of Stony Rapids and Black Lake. Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation would be responsible for construction and maintenance, with a one-time capital cost contribution from the federal government. The result would be to change the Athabasca's reliance on a resupply route by water from Alberta to a road link to the South.

The 180-kilometre Athabasca seasonal road was built, primarily during winter months, over a two-year period from late 1997 to late 1999 at a cost of more than $13 million. Upgrading of the road to become an all-weather route is a short-term desire but is considered a long-term plan for northern transportation development.[120]

The Athabasca road is not only about access. It is also a success story about partnerships. One of three construction contracts was awarded to a northern joint-venture company. As is increasingly common for northern construction projects, local hire clauses formed part of the contracts. Once the road was in place, maintenance was contracted to the Athabasca Basin Development Corporation, which involved a consortium of four northern and First Nation-owned companies.



The official opening of the Garson Lake Road in April, 1999. Left to right are Ida Lemaigre of La Loche, Highways and Transportation Minister Judy Bradley, John Janvier of La Loche, Keith Goulet, Minister of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs, and Hon. Buckley Belanger, MLA Athabasca. *[Photograph courtesy of Saskatchewan Northern Affairs]*

A further contracting opportunity developed in 1997 when Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation agreed to transfer operating and maintenance responsibility for ferry, winter road and airfield services for the community and Reserve at Wollaston Lake to the Hatchet Lake First Nation Economic Development Corporation. Wollaston Lake and Fond du Lac continue to seek federal and provincial support to extend the northern road network to their communities.[121]

Two other communities achieved their first road access during the 1990s – Grandmother's Bay and Garson Lake. Grandmother's Bay, a community of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, is just 12 kilometres from Highway 102, but was accessible only by water. With no airfield, it meant no safe access was possible during break-up and freeze-up each year. The situation was resolved with construction of a new road, completed in 1996 and cost-shared by the federal and provincial governments.[122]

Garson Lake is a small community southwest of La Loche and is very close to the Alberta border. Its residents desired all-weather road access, supported by family ties to La Loche. Both communities argued that such a road would provide forest harvesting access and the beginnings of a northern link to Alberta. They saw the road as an opportunity to train and employ local people in heavy equipment operation. With assistance from Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation and Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education and

The new bridge at Cumberland House now provides year round access to the community. *[Photograph courtesy of Woodland Aerial Photography]*

Skills Training, the two communities mustered projects to develop the road over a period of 12 years, marking its completion in April 1999. They have attracted the interest of their western neighbours who are now considering options to link with the new road from Alberta.[123]

A much larger northern community facing isolation for periods between seasonal ferry service and construction of an ice road across the North Saskatchewan River was Saskatchewan's oldest community, Cumberland House. For decades the municipal council and First Nation Band sought provincial and federal assistance for a bridge. In 1996 they gathered on the banks of the river to officially cut the ribbon – the bridge was in place. Pavement from the bridge through the community to the airport was completed in 2000.[124]

The past decade led to other significant transportation infrastructure improvements in northern Saskatchewan. Highway 165, the east-west link between Highways 2 and 155 (connecting to Pinehouse and Key Lake) has been largely rebuilt. The same is true for the access road to Turnor Lake. In addition to the La Ronge and Uranium City airports, major airfield improvements were made at Stony Rapids, Fond du Lac and Wollaston Lake.

To increase regional awareness and input for long-term service planning, Area Transportation Planning Committees were introduced across the province including three Committees in the North. These groups meet regularly with the Department of Highways and Transportation to present local and regional perspectives, consider options and make suggestions to department planners.

COMMUNICATIONS

As with transportation infrastructure, northern communications takes on added importance given the long distances between communities and to larger centres in southern Saskatchewan. Since the 1940s, when Saskatchewan pioneered the development of a High Frequency Radio network, northern communications have again been transformed by new technology.

SaskTel microwave and satellite technology made it possible to extend telephone, broadcast radio and television services throughout the North. In the 1970s, several community radio stations were established and the CBC introduced northern radio programming produced from a bureau in La Ronge and broadcast over their northern network of transmitters that served all communities of 500 population or greater. Later, with the advent of the federal government's Northern Native Broadcast Access Program, regional Aboriginal broadcasting agencies developed including northern Saskatchewan's Missinipi Broadcasting Corporation.

During the 1990s, SaskTel introduced a new generation of radiophones, satellite phones and, in some northern areas, cellular phone service. Satellite-based services such as the Saskatchewan Communications Network cable television and distance learning facilities are now available in many northern communities. The Telehealth program has provided a valuable new communication tool for health professionals and their patients. Now, the CommunityNet and Headwaters projects, described elsewhere in this publication, are extending high speed, multi-purpose Internet services across the North. Advances in communications are ending the isolation of the North - generating new means to support commercial, cultural and educational aspirations.

CONCLUSION

Northern Saskatchewan as we know it today has come a long way in the past 100 years. In 1905, the year the province officially joined Confederation, people living in northern regions remained cut off from the rest of the province. There was no industry development, no government services available to northerners, and there was practically no communication with the South – northern Saskatchewan was out of sight – out of mind.

Since then there were different attempts by government and industry to develop economic and social opportunities in the North, enhance and decentralize government services, increase accessibility, and allow northerners the opportunity to control their own destiny.

Northern Saskatchewan is a rich, resource-based economy that holds tremendous potential. In the past decade in particular, forestry and mining initiatives have provided hundreds of jobs even for people living in the most remote regions of the North. Trapping, commercial fishing, and wild rice production are providing northerners with an opportunity to maintain a traditional way of life yet have access to economic opportunity.

Northerners are taking control of their destiny, making decisions relevant to their specific needs and priorities, and developing their communities for future generations. Northerners are directly engaging in the northern economy through new initiatives such as eco-tourism, and value-added processing. They are becoming more involved with other traditional industries based upon land resources such as forestry, mining, and commercial fishing.

The key responsibility is to tap into northern Saskatchewan's potential through initiatives that are safe, environmentally and culturally sensitive, and most importantly provide benefits directly to northerners. This recognizes it was northerners and their descendents who persevered and worked so hard to shape and mould northern Saskatchewan this past century into the unique region of Saskatchewan that it is today.

NORTHERN ADMINISTRATION DISTRICT (NAD)

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